

The Christian
In Complete Armour

Volume Two

A Treatise of The Whole Armour of God

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

— Ephesians, chap. 6 vv. 13-20

Part Second.—DIRECTION EIGHTH.

THE SEVERAL PIECES OF THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD.

Fourth Piece—The Christian’s Spiritual Shield.

‘Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.’

— Ephesians 6:16

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

EXPLICATION OF THE WORDS.

In the exhortation ‘Above all, taking the shield of faith, whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked,’ these four particulars call for our inquiry towards the explication of the words. **FIRST.**

What faith it is that is here commended to the Christian soldier. SECOND. Having found the kind, we are to inquire what his faith is as to its nature. THIRD. Why it is compared to a shield rather than other pieces. FOURTH. What is the importance of this ἔπι πάντων, 'above all.'

[THE KIND OF FAITH here meant.]

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

[Justifying faith, AS TO ITS NATURE.]

SECOND INQUIRY. What is this justifying faith as to its nature?

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

First. Negatively, in two particulars.

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

upon that. As the promise is true, so it calls for an act of assent from the understanding; and as it is good as well as true, so it calls for an act of the will to embrace and receive it. Therefore, he which only notionally knows the promise, and speculatively assents to the truth of it, without clinging to it, and embracing of it, doth not believe savingly, and can have no more benefit from the promise, than nourishment from the food he sees and acknowledgeth to be wholesome, but eats none of.

2. Justifying faith is not assurance. If it were, St. John might have spared his pains, who wrote to them that 'believed on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life,' 1 John 5:13. They might then have said 'We do this already. What else is our faith, but a believing that we are such as through Christ are pardoned, and shall through him be saved?' But this cannot be so. If faith were assurance, then a man's sins would be pardoned before he believes, for he must necessarily be pardoned before he can know he is pardoned. The candle must be lighted before I can see it is lighted. The child must be born before I can be assured it is born. The object must be before the act. Assurance rather is the fruit of faith. It is in faith as the flower is in the root. Faith, in time, after much communion with God, acquaintance with the word, and experience of his dealings with the soul, may flourish into assurance. But, as the root truly lives before the flower appears, and continues when that hath shed its beautiful leaves, and gone again; so doth true justifying faith live before assurance comes, and after it disappears. Assurance is, as it were, the cream of faith. Now you know there is milk before there is cream, this riseth not but after some time standing, and there remains milk after it is fleted off. How many, alas! of the precious saints of God must we shut out from being believers, if there is no faith but what amounts to assurance? We must needs offend against the generation of God's children, among whom some are babes, not yet come to the use of their reflex act of faith, so as to own the graces of God in them to be true, upon the review that they take of their own actings. And, must not the child be allowed to be a child, till he can speak for himself, and say he is so? Others there are in Christ's family, who are of higher stature and greater experience in the ways of God, yet have lost those

apprehensions of pardoning mercy, which once they were, through the goodness of God, able to have shown—shall we say their faith went away in the departure of their assurance? How oft then in a year may a believer be no believer? even as oft as God withdraws and leaves the creature in the dark. Assurance is like the sun-flower, which opens with the day and shuts with the night. It follows the motion of God's face. If that looks smilingly on the soul, it lives; if that frowns or hides itself, it dies. But faith is a plant that can grow in the shade, a grace that can find the way to heaven in a dark night. It can 'walk in darkness,' and yet 'trust in the name of the Lord,' Isa. 50:10. In a word, by making the essence of faith to lie in assurance, we should not only offend against the generation of God's children, but against the God and Father of these children; for at one clap we turn the greater number of those children he hath here on earth out of doors. Yes, we are cruel to those he is most tender of, and make sad the hearts of those that he would have chiefly comforted. Indeed if this were true, a great part of gospel provision laid up in the promises is of little use. We read of promises to those that mourn, 'they shall be comforted,' to the contrite, 'they shall be revived,' to him that 'walks in darkness,' and the like. These belong to believers, and none else. Surely then there are some believers that are in the dark, under the hatches of sorrow, wounded and broken with their sins, and temptation for them. But they are not such as are assured of the love of God; their water is turned into joy, their night into light, their sighs and sobs into joy and praise.

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

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

1. The subject where faith is seated, not any single faculty, but the soul. Of this I have spoken some-

thing before, and so pass on to the second point.

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

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

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

confidence on.

Again, faith observes how Christ performed this great work, and accordingly how the promise holds him forth to be applied for pardon and salvation. Now faith finds that then Christ made the full payment to the justice of God for sin, when he poured out his blood to death upon the cross. All the precedaneous¹ acts of his humiliation were but preparatory to this. He was born to die; he was sent into the world as a lamb bound with the bonds of an irreversible decree for a sacrifice. Christ himself when he came into the world understood this to be the errand he was sent on, Heb. 10:5. 'Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me;' i.e. to be an expiatory sacrifice. Without this, all he had done would have been labour undone. No redemption but by his blood, 'In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,' Eph. 1:7. No church without his blood, 'The church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood,' Acts 20:28. *E latere Christi morientis exstitit ecclesia*—the church is taken out of dying Jesus' side, as Eve out of sleeping Adam's. Christ did not redeem and save poor souls by sitting in majesty on his heavenly throne, but by hanging on the shameful cross, under the tormenting hand of man's fury and God's just wrath. And therefore the poor soul, that would have pardon of sin, is directed to place his faith not only on Christ, but on bleeding Christ, Rom. 3:25: 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.'

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

1. Precedaneous: Preceding; antecedent; anterior. From Webster's 1828 Dictionary. — SDB

satisfy him with, was—

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

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

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

peace with God, and we shall make peace with him.' It is not the sight of a man's arm stretched out to a man in the water will save him from drowning, but the taking hold of it. Christ is a stone. Faith builds upon Christ for salvation. And how? but by laying its whole weight and expectation of mercy on him. What Paul, II Tim. 1:12, calls 'believing' in the former part of the verse, he calls in the latter part a 'committing to him to be kept against that day.'

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

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

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

(a) He is to inquire out a promise, and observe well the terms on which it runs. Indeed upon the point it comes all to one; to believe without a promise, or to believe on a promise, but not observe the terms of it. Both are presumptuous, and speed alike. A prince hath as much reason to be angry with him that doth not keep close to his commission, as with another that acts without any commission. O how

little considered is this by many who make bold of God's arm to lean on for pardon and salvation, but never think that the promise, which presents Christ to leaned on as a Saviour, presents him at the same time to be chosen as a Lord and Prince! Such were the rebellious Israelites, who durst make God and his promise a leaning-stock for their foul elbows to rest on. 'They call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel; The Lord of hosts is his name,' Isa. 48:2; but they were more bold than welcome. God rejected their confidence and loathed their sauciness. Though a prince would not disdain to let a poor wounded man, faint with bleeding, and unable to go alone, upon his humble request, make use of his arm, rather than he should perish in the streets; yet he would, with indignation, reject the same motion from a filthy drunkard that is besmeared with his vomit, if he should desire leave to lean on him because he cannot go alone. I am sure, how welcome soever the poor humble soul—that lies bleeding for his sins at the very mouth of hell in his own thoughts—is to God when he comes upon the encouragement of the promise to lean on Christ, yet the profane wretch that emboldens himself to come to Christ, shall be kicked away with infinite disdain and abhorrency by a holy God for abusing his promise.

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

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

[WHY faith is compared to a SHIELD.]

THIRD INQUIRY. Why is faith compared to a shield?

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

First Resemblance. This shield is not for the defence of any particular part of the body—as almost all the other pieces are—the helmet fitted for the head, the plate designed for the breast, and so others having their several parts which they are fastened to—but is intended for the defence of the whole body. It was used therefore to be made very large, for its broadness called *θυρεὸς*, of {from} *θύρα*, a gate or door, because so long and large as in a manner to cover the whole body. To this that place alludes, 'For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield,' Ps. 5:12. And if the shield were not large enough at once to cover every part, yet, being a movable piece of armour, the skilful soldier might turn it this way or that way, to latch the

blow or arrow from lighting on any part they were directed to. And this indeed doth excellently well set forth the universal use that faith is of to the Christian. It defends the whole man; every part of the Christian by it preserved. Sometimes the temptation is levelled at the head. Satan, he will be disputing against this truth and that, to make the Christian, if he can, call them into question, merely because his reason and understanding cannot comprehend them; and he prevails with some that do not think themselves the unwise in the world, upon this very account, to blot the deity of Christ, with other mysterious truths of the gospel, quite out of their creed. Now faith interposeth between the Christian and this arrow. It comes into the relief of the Christian's weak understanding as seasonably as Zeruah did to David, when the giant Ishbi-benob thought to have slain him. I will trust the word of God, saith the believer, rather than my own purblind reason. 'Abraham not being weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead,' Rom. 4:19. If sense should have had the hearing of that business, yea, if that holy man had put it to a reference between sense and reason also, what resolution his thoughts should come to concerning this strange message that was brought him, he would have been in danger of calling the truth of it in question, though God himself was the messenger; but faith brought him honourably off.

Again, Is it conscience that the tempter assaults?—and it is not seldom that he is shooting his fiery darts of horror and terror at his mark. Faith receives the shock, and saves the creature harmless: 'I had fainted, unless I had believed,' saith David, Ps. 27:13. He means when false witnesses rose up against him, and such as breathed out cruelty, as appears, ver. 12. Faith was his best fence against man's charge; and so it is against Satan's and conscience's also. Never was a man in a sadder condition than the poor jailer, Acts 16. Much ado he had to keep his own hands from offering violence to himself. Who that had seen him fall trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas, with that sad question in his mouth, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' ver. 30, could have thought this deep wound that was now given his conscience, would so soon have been closed and cured as we find it, ver. 34. The earthquake of horror that did so dreadfully shake his conscience is gone, and his trembling turned into

rejoicing. Now mark what made this blessed calm. 'Believe,' saith Paul, 'on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,' ver. 31; and ver. 34, it is said, he 'rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.' It is faith stills the storm which sin had raised—faith that changed his doleful note into joy and gladness. Happy man he was, that had such skilful chirurgeons so near him, who could direct him the nearest way to a cure.

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

honour here below; to stand before the throne there, and minister to God in immediate service, than to sit in a throne on earth and have all the world waiting at his foot.

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

[The import of the expression 'ABOVE ALL.']

FOURTH INQUIRY. What doth this ἐπι πάσι, 'above all,' import?

There is variety among interpreters about it. Jerome reads it, in omnibus, sumentes scutum fidei—in all things taking the shield of faith, i.e. in all duties, enterprises, temptations, or afflictions—in whatever you are called to do or suffer, take faith. Indeed, faith to the Christian is like fire to the chemist; nothing can be done without it christianly. 'But without faith it is impossible to please God,' Heb. 11:6. And how can the Christian please himself in that wherein he doth not please his God? Others read it, 'Over all take the shield of faith,' i.e. take it over all your graces, as that which will cover them. All other graces have their safety from faith; they lie secure under the shadow of faith, as an army lies safe under the protection and command of a strong castle planted round with cannon. But we shall follow our translation, as being most comprehensive, and that which will take these within its compass. 'Above all, take,' &c., that is, among all the pieces of armour which you are to provide and wear for your defence, let this have the pre-eminence of your care to get; and having got, to keep it. Now, that the apostle meant to give a preeminency to faith above the other graces appears,

First. By the piece of armour he compares it to—the shield. This, of old, was prized above all other pieces by soldiers. They counted it greater shame to

lose their shield, than to lose the field, and therefore when under the very foot of their enemy, they would not part with it, but esteemed it an honour to die with their shield in their hand. It was the charge that one laid upon her son, going into the wars, when she gave him a shield, 'that he should either bring his shield home with him, or be brought home upon his shield.' She had rather see him dead with it, than come home alive without it.

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

DIRECTION VIII.—FIRST GENERAL PART.

[THE PRE-EMINENCE OF FAITH ABOVE OTHER GRACES.]

THE EXHORTATION—‘Above all, taking the shield of faith’ (Eph. 6:16).

Of all graces faith is the chief, and is chiefly to be laboured for. There is a precedency or pre-eminence peculiar to this above all other. It is among graces, as the sun is among the planets, or as Solomon’s ‘virtuous woman among the daughters,’ Prov. 31:29. Though every grace had done virtuously, yet thou, O faith, excellest them all. The apostle indeed give the precedency to love, and sets faith on the lower hand. ‘And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity,’ 1 Cor. 13:13. Yet, you may observe, that this prelation of it before faith hath a particular respect to the saints’s blissful state in heaven, where love remains, and faith ceaseth. In that regard love indeed is the greater, because it is the end of our faith. We apprehend by faith that we may enjoy by love. But, if we consider the Christian’s present state, while militant on earth, in this respect love must give place to faith. It is true, love is the grace that shall triumph in heaven. But it is faith, not love, which is the conquering grace on earth. ‘This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,’ 1 John 5:4. Love indeed hath its place in the battle, and doth excellent service, but is under faith its leader. ‘Faith which worketh by love,’ Gal. 5:6. Even as the captain fighteth by his soldiers whom he leads on, so faith works by love which it excites. Love, it is true, is the grace that at last possesseth the inheritance, but it is faith that gives the Christian right unto it. Without this he should never have enjoyed it, John 1:12. In a word, it is love that unites God and glorified saints together in heaven; but it was faith that first united them to Christ while they were on earth—‘That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith,’ Eph. 3:17. And if Christ had dwelt in them by faith on earth, they should never have dwelt with God in heaven.

BRANCH FIRST.

[FOUR PARTICULARS in which faith stands pre-eminent above other graces.]

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

FIRST PARTICULAR. In the great inquiry that God makes after faith above all other graces. Nothing more speaks our esteem of persons or things than our inquiry after them. We ask first and most for those that stand highest in our thoughts. ‘Is your father well?’ said Joseph, ‘the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?’ Gen. 43:27. No doubt there were others of whose welfare Joseph would have been glad to hear also, but being most pent and pained with a natural affection to his father, he easeth himself of this first. And when David asks for Absalom above all others, ‘Is the young man Absalom safe?’ and over again with it to Cush, II Sam. 18, it was easy to guess

how highly he valued his life. Now you shall find the great inquiry that God makes is for faith: ‘When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?’ Luke 18:8—implying that this is the grace which he will especially look for and desires to find. We read, John 9, of a great miracle, a man by Christ restored to his sight that was born blind. This so enraged the malicious Pharisees that they excommunicate the poor man for no other fault but giving his merciful physician a good word. This brings Christ the sooner to him—so tender is he of those that suffer for him, that they shall not long want his sweet company—and he hath no cause to complain for being cast out of man’s society that gains Christ’s presence by the same. Now, observe what Christ saith to him at his first meeting, ver. 35, ‘Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?’ The man had already expressed some zeal for Christ, in vindicating him, and speaking well of him to the head of the bitterest enemies he had on earth, for which he was now made a sufferer at their hands. This was very

commendable. But there is one thing Christ prizeth above all this, and that is faith. This he inquires after, 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God?' As if he had said, 'All this thy zeal in speaking for me, and patience in suffering, are nothing worth in my account except thou hast faith also.' Indeed most of God's dealings with his people, what are they but inquiries after faith? either the truth or strength of it. When he afflicts them, it is 'for the trial of their faith,' I Peter 1:7. Afflictions they are God's spade and mattock, by which he digs into his people's hearts to find out this gold of faith. Not but that he inquires for other graces also; but this is named for all as the chief; which found, all the other will soon appear. When God seems to delay, and makes, as it were, a halt in his providence, before he comes with the mercy he promiseth, and we pray for, it is exploratory to faith. 'O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt,' Matt. 15:28. She had received her answer without so much ado; only Christ had a mercy in store more than she thought of. With the granting of her suit in the cure of her daughter, he had a mind to give her the evidence of her faith also, and the high esteem God hath of his grace, as that which may have of him what it will.

SECOND PARTICULAR. The commendations that are given to faith above other graces. You shall observe, that in the same action wherein other graces are eminently exercised as well as faith, even then faith is taken notice of, and the crown set upon faith's head rather than any of the other. We hear nothing almost of any other grace throughout the whole 11th of Hebrews but faith. 'By faith Abraham,' 'by faith Jacob,' and the rest of those worthies, did all those famous exploits. There was a concurrence of the other graces with faith in them all. But all goes under the name of faith. The whole army fight, yet the general or the captain hath the honour of the victory ascribed to him. Alexander and Cæsar's names are transmitted to posterity as the great conquerors that overcame so many battles, not the private soldiers that fought under them. Faith is the captain grace. All those famous acts of those saints are recorded as the achievements of faith. Thus concerning the centurion, 'Verily,' saith Christ, 'I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel,' Matt. 8:10. There were other graces very eminent in the centurion besides his faith;—his con-

scientious care of his poor servant, for whom he could have done no more if he had been his own child. There are some that call themselves Christians, yet would not have troubled themselves so much for a sick servant. Such, alas! are oft less regarded in sickness than their master's beast. But, especially his humility; this shined forth very eminently in that self-abasing expression: 'Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof,' Matt. 8:8. Consider but his calling and degree therein, and it makes his humility more conspicuous. A swordsman, yea, a commander! such use to speak big and high. Power is seldom such a friend to humility. Surely he was a man of a rare humble spirit, that he, whose mouth was used so much to words of command over his soldiers, could so demit² and humble himself in his address to Christ; yet his faith outshines his humility in its greatest strength. Not, I have not found such humility, but 'such faith' in all Israel. As if Christ had said, 'There is not one believer in all Israel but I know him, and how rich he is in faith also; but I have not found so much of this heavenly treasure in any one hand as in this centurion's.' Indeed the Christian's chief riches is in faith's hand. 'Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith?' James 2:5. Why rich in faith, rather than rich in patience, rich in love, or any other grace? O great reason for it, when the creature comes to lay claim to pardon of sin, the favour of God, and heaven itself. It is not love, patience, &c., but faith alone that lays down the price of all these. Not 'Lord, pardon, save me, here is my love and patience for it;' but 'here is Christ, and the price of his blood, which faith presents thee for the full purchase of them all.' This leads to a third particular, and indeed the chief of all.

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

2. Demit: dismiss; resign, to withdraw from office or membership. From Webster's — SDB

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

In a word, then, we should be justified by a righteousness of our own, for faith is a grace inherent in us, and as much our own work as any grace besides is. But this is contrary to the same apostle's doctrine, Php. 3:9, where our own righteousness, and the righteousness which is by faith, are declared to be inconsistent. It can therefore be called 'the righteousness of faith' for this reason and no other—because faith is the only grace whose office it is to lay hold on Christ, and so to appropriate his righteousness for the justification of our souls. Christ and faith are relatives which must not be severed. Christ, he is the treasure, and faith the hand which receives it. Christ's righteousness is the robe, faith the hand that puts it on; so that it is Christ who is the treasure. By his blood he dischargeth our debt, and not by faith; whose office is only to receive Christ, whereby he becomes ours. It is Christ's righteousness that is the robe which covers our nakedness, and makes us beautiful in God's eye; only, faith hath the honour to put

the robe on the soul, and it is no small honour that is therein put upon it above other graces. As God graced Moses exceedingly above the rest of his brethren the Israelites, when he was called up the mount to receive the law from God's mouth, while they had their bounds set them—to stand waiting at the bottom of the hill till he brought it down to them; so doth God highly honour faith, to call this up as the grace by whose hand he will convey this glorious privilege of justification over to us.

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

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

Answer Second. There is no grace that God could trust his honour so safely with in this business of justification as with faith. The great design God hath in justifying a poor sinner is to magnify his free mercy in the eye of his creature. This is written in such fair characters in the word, that he who runs {to it} may read it. God was resolved that his free mercy should go away with all the honour, and the creature should be quite cut out from any pretensions to partnership with him therein. Now there is no way like to this of being justified by faith, for the securing and safe-guarding of the glory of God's free grace, Rom. 3:25, 26. When the apostle hath in some verses together discoursed of the free justification of a sinner before God, he goes on to show how this cuts the very comb, yea throat, of all self-exalting thoughts, ver. 27: 'Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.' Princes, of all wrongs, most disdain and abhor to see their royal bed defiled. So jealous they have been of this, that, for the prevention of all suspicion of such a foul fact, it hath been of old the custom of the greatest monarchs, that those who were their favourites, and admitted into nearest attendance upon their own per-

sons and queens, should be eunuchs—such whose very disability of nature might remove all suspicion of any such attempt by them. Truly, God is more jealous of having the glory of his name ravished by the pride and self-glorifying of the creature, than ever any prince was of having his queen deflowered. And therefore to secure it from any such horrid abuse, he hath chosen faith—this eunuch grace, as I may so call it—to stand so nigh him, and be employed by him in this high act of grace, whose very nature, being a self-emptying grace, renders it incapable of entering into any such design against the glory of God’s grace. Faith hath two hands; with one it pulls off its own righteousness and throws it away, as David did Saul’s armour; with the other it puts on Christ’s righteousness over the soul’s shame, as that in which it dares alone see God or be seen of him. ‘This makes it impossible,’ saith learned and holy Master Ball, ‘how to conceive that faith and works should be conjoined as concauses in justification; seeing the one—that is faith—attributes all to the free grace of God; the other—that is works—challenge to themselves. The one, that is faith, will aspire no higher but to be the instrumental cause of free remission; the other can sit no lower, but to be the matter of justification, if any cause at all. For, if works be accounted to us in the room or place of exact obedience in free justification, do they not supply the place? are they not advanced to the dignity of works complete and perfect in justification from justice?’ *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, p. 70.

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

[The influence of faith reacheth
unto all other graces.]

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

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

Love is another heavenly grace; but faith gathers the fuel that makes this fire. Speak, Christian, whose soul now flames with love to God, was it always thus? No! sure there was a time, I dare say for thee, when thy heart was cold—not a spark of this fire to be found on the altar of thy heart. How is this then,

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

Second. As faith sets the other graces on work by actuating their objects, about which they are conversant, so it helps them all to work, by fetching

strength from Christ to act and reinforce them. Faith is not only the instrument to receive the righteousness of Christ for our justification, but it is also the great instrument to receive grace from Christ for our sanctification. 'Of his fulness...we receive grace for grace,' John 1:16. But how do we receive it? Even by faith. Faith unites the soul to Christ; and as by a pipe laid close to the mouth of a fountain water is carried to our houses for the supply of the whole family, so by faith is derived to the soul supply in abundance for the particular offices of all the several graces. He that believes, 'out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water,' John 7:38. That is, he that hath faith, and is careful to live in the exercise of it, shall have a flow and an increase of all other graces, called here 'living waters.' Hence it is that the saints, when they would advance to a high pitch in other graces, pray for the increase of their faith. Our Saviour, Luke 17:3, 4, sets his apostles a very hard lesson when he would wind up their love to such a high pitch as to forgive their offending brother 'seven times' in a day. Now mark, ver. 5—'The apostles,' apprehending the difficulty of the duty, 'said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.' But why did they rather not say, 'Increase our love,' seeing that was the grace they were to exercise in forgiving their brother? Surely it was not because love hath its increase from faith. If they could get more faith on Christ, they might be sure they should have more love to their brother also. The more strongly they could believe on Christ for the pardon of their own sins, not 'seven,' but 'seventy times' in a day committed against God, the more easy it would be to forgive their brother offending themselves seven times a day. This interpretation, our Saviour's reply to their prayer for faith favours, ver. 6—'And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.' Where Christ shows the efficacy of justifying faith by the power of a faith of miracles. As if he had said, 'You have hit on the right way to get a forgiving spirit; it is faith indeed that would enable you to conquer the unmercifulness of your hearts. Though it were as deeply rooted in you as this sycamore-tree is in the ground, yet by faith you should be able to pluck it up.' When we would have the whole tree fruitful, we think we do enough to

water the root, knowing what the root sucks from the earth it will soon disperse into the branches. Thus that sap and fatness, faith, which is the radical grace, draws from Christ, will be quickly diffused through the branches of the other graces, and tasted in the pleasantness of their fruit.

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

Fourth. Faith alone procures acceptance with God for all the other graces and their works. 'By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice,' Heb. 11:4. When a Christian hath wrought hardest in a day, and hath spun the finest, evenest, thread of obedience at the wheel of duty, he is afraid to carry home his work at night with an expectation of any acceptance at God's hands for his work's sake. No, it is faith he makes use of to present it through Christ to

God for acceptance. We are said, I Peter 2:5, 'To offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ;' That is, by faith in Christ, for without faith Christ makes none of our sacrifices acceptable. God takes nothing kindly but what the hand of faith presents. And so prevalent is faith with God, that he will take light gold—broken services—at her hand; which, were they to come alone, would be rejected with indignation. As a favourite that hath the ear of his prince, finds it easy to get his poor kindred entertained at court also (so Joseph brought his brethren into Pharaoh's presence with great demonstrations of favour shown them by him for his sake; and Esther wound Mordecai into a high preferment in Ahasuerus' court, who upon his own credit could get no farther than to sit at the gate), thus faith brings those works and duties into God's presence, which else were sure to be shut out, and, pleading the righteousness of Christ, procures them to be received into such high favour with God, that they become his delight, Prov. 15:8, and as a pleasant perfume in his nostrils, Mal. 3:4.

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

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

(1.) By laying claim to the fulness of that grace which is in Christ as its own. Why art thou dejected,

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

(2.) Faith succours the Christian in the weakness and inactivity of his graces, by applying the promises for the saints' perseverance in grace. It brings great comfort to a sick man, though very weak at present, to hear his physician tell him, that though he is low and feeble, yet there is no fear he will die. The present weakness of grace is sad, but the fear of falling quite away is far sadder. Now faith, and only faith, can be the messenger to bring the good news to the soul, that it shall persevere. Sense and reason are quite posed and dunced here. It seems impossible to them, that such a bruised reed should bear up against all the counterblasts of hell, because they consider only what grace itself can do, and finding it so over-matched by the power and policy of Satan, think it but rational to give the victory to the stronger side. But faith, when it seeth symptoms of death in the saint's grace, finds life in the promise, and comforts the soul with this—that the faithful God will not suffer his grace to see corruption. He hath undertaken the physicking of his saints: 'Every branch in me that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth

more fruit' John 15:2. When Hazael came to inquire of Elisha for his sick master, whether he should live or die; the prophet sent him with this answer back unto the king his master: 'Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die,' II Kings 8:10—that is, he might certainly recover for all his disease, but he should die by the traitorous bloody hand of Hazael his servant. Give me leave only to allude to this. When the Christian consults with his faith, and inquires of it, whether his weak grace will fail or hold out, die or live, faith's answer is, 'Thy weak grace may certainly die and fall away, but the Lord hath showed me it shall live and persevere'—that is, in regard of its own weakness and the mutability of man's nature, the Christian's grace might certainly die and come to nothing; but God hath shown faith in the promise that it shall certainly live and recover out of its lowest weakness. What David said in regard of his house, that every Christian may say in regard of his grace. 'Though his grace be not so with God (so strong, so unchangeable in itself), yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire,' II Sam. 23:5. This salt of the covenant is it shall keep, saith faith, thy weak grace from corruption. 'Why art thou cast down,' saith the psalmist, 'O my soul? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God,' Ps. 42:11. The health of David's countenance was not in his countenance, but in his God, and this makes his faith silence his fears, and so peremptorily resolve upon it, that there is a time coming—how near soever he now lies to the grave's mouth—when he shall yet praise him. 'The health and life of thy grace lie both of them, not in thy grace,' saith faith, 'but in God, who is thy God, therefore I shall yet live and praise him.' I do not wonder that the weak Christian is melancholy and sad when he sees his sickly face in any other glass but this.

2. In the evidence of them the Christian's grace may fail. It may disappear, as stars do in a cloudy night. How oft do we hear the Christian say in an hour of desertion and temptation, 'I know not whether I love God or no in sincerity; I dare not say I have any true godly sorrow for sin; indeed I have thought formerly these graces had a being in me, but now I am at a loss what to think, yea, sometimes I am

ready to fear the worst.’ Now in this dark benighted state, faith undergirds the soul’s ship, and hath two anchors it casts forth, whereby the soul is stayed from being driven upon the devouring quicksands of despair and horror.

(1.) Faith makes a discovery of the rich mercy in Christ to poor sinners, and calls the soul to look up to it, when it hath lost the sight of his own grace. It is no small comfort to a man, that hath lost his acquaintance for a debt paid, when he remembers that the man he deals with is a merciful good man, though his discharge be not presently to be found. That God whom thou hast to do with is very gracious; what thou hast lost he is ready to restore—the evidence of thy grace I mean. David begged this and obtained it, see Ps. 51. ‘Yea,’ saith faith, ‘if it were true what thou fearest, that thy grace was never true, there is mercy enough in God’s heart to pardon all thy former hypocrisy, if now thou comest in the sincerity of thy heart.’ And so, faith persuades the soul by an act of adventure to cast itself upon God in Christ. ‘Wilt thou not,’ saith faith, ‘expect to find as much mercy at God’s hands as thou canst look for at a man’s?’ It is not beyond the line of created mercy to forgive many unkindnesses, much falseness and unfaithfulness, upon a humble sincere acknowledgment of the same. The world is not so bad, but it abounds with parents that can do thus much for their children, and masters for their servants; and is that hard for God to do which is so easy in his creature? Thus faith vindicates God’s name. And so long as we have not lost the sight of God’s merciful heart, our head will be kept above water, though we want the evidence of our own grace.

(2.) Faith makes a discovery of the rich mercy in Christ to poor sinners, and calls the soul to look up to it, when it hath lost the sight of his own grace. And it is some comfort, though a man hath no bread in his cupboard, to hear there is some to be had in the market. ‘O,’ saith the complaining Christian, ‘there were some hope, if I could find but those relentings and meltings of soul which others have in their bosoms for sin; then I could run under the shadow of that promise and take comfort, ‘Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted,’ Matt. 5:4. But alas! my heart is as hard as the flint.’ ‘Well,’ saith faith, ‘for thy comfort know, there are not only promises to the

mourning soul and broken heart, but there are promises that God will break the heart, and give a spirit of mourning.’ So for other graces; not only promises to those that fear God, but to ‘put the fear of God into our hearts;’ not only promises to those that walk in his statutes and keep his judgments, but also to ‘put his spirit within us, and cause us to walk in his statutes,’ Eze. 36:27. Why then, O my soul, dost thou sit there bemoaning thyself fruitlessly for what thou sayest thou hast not, when thou knowest where thou mayest have it for going? As Jacob said to his sons, ‘Why do ye look one upon another? Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die,’ Gen. 42:1, 2. Thus faith rouseth the Christian out of his amazed thoughts upon which his troubled spirit dwells like one destitute of counsel, not knowing what to do; and turns his bootless complaints, wherein he must necessarily pine and starve, into fervent prayer for that grace he wants. ‘There is bread in the promise,’ saith faith. Sit not here languishing in a sluggish despondency, but get you down upon your knees, and humbly, but valiantly, besiege the throne of grace for grace in this time of need. And certainly, the Christian may sooner get a new evidence for his grace, by pleading the promise, and plying the throne of grace, than by yielding so far to his unbelieving thoughts as to sit down and melt away his strength and time in the bitterness of his spirit—which Satan dearly likes—without using the means, which he will never do to any purpose, till faith brings thus much encouragement from the promise, that what he wants is there to be had freely and fully.

Sixth. As faith succours the Christian when his other graces fail him most, so it brings in his comfort when they most abound. Faith is to the Christian as Nehemiah was to Artaxerxes, Neh. 2:1. Of all the graces this is the Christian’s cup-bearer. The Christian takes the wine of joy out of faith’s hand, rather than any other grace. ‘Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,’ Rom. 15:13. It is observable, 1 Peter 1, to see how the apostle therefore doth, as it were, cross his hands, as once Jacob did in blessing his son Joseph’s children, and gives the pre-eminence to faith, attributing the Christian’s joy to his faith, rather than to his love ver. 8: ‘Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him

not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' Mark, 'believing, ye rejoice.' Here is the door, the Christian's chief joy, yea, all his fiduciary joy comes in at. It is Christ that we are in this respect allowed only to rejoice in, Php. 3:3 'For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,'—where Christ is made the sole subject of our rejoicing fiduciarily, in opposition to all else, even our graces themselves, which become flesh when thus rejoiced and glorified in. Christ's blood is the wine that only glads the heart of God by way of satisfaction to his justice, and therefore only that can bring true gladness into the heart of man. When Christ promiseth the Comforter, he tells his disciples from what vessel he should draw the wine of joy that he was to give them: 'He shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you,' John 16:15. No grape of our own vine is pressed into this sweet cup. As if Christ had said, When he comes to comfort you with the pardon of your sins, 'he shall take of mine,' not anything of yours—my blood by which I purchased your peace with God, not your own tears of repentance by which you have mourned for your sins. All the blessed privileges which believers are instated into, they are the fruits of Christ's purchase, not of our earnings. Now, the Christian's joy flowing in from Christ, and not anything that he, poor creature, doth or hath; hence it comes to pass, that faith, above all the graces, brings in the Christian's joy and comfort, because this is the grace that improves Christ and what is Christ's for the soul's advantage. As of grace, so of comfort. Faith is the good spy, that makes discovery of the excellences in Christ, and then makes report of all to the soul it sees in him and knows of him. It is faith that broaches the promises, turns the cock and sets them a running into the soul. It doth not only show the soul how excellent Christ is, and what dainties are in the promises; but it applies Christ to the soul, and carves out the sweet viands that are dished forth in the promises. Yea, it puts them into the very mouth of the soul; it masticates and grinds the promise so, that the Christian is filled with its strength and sweetness. Till faith comes and brings the news of the soul's welcome, O how maidenly and uncomfortably do poor creatures sit at the table of the promise! Like Hannah, 'they weep and eat not.' No, alas! they dare

not be so bold. But, when faith comes, then the soul falls to, and makes a satisfying meal indeed. No dish on the table but faith will taste of. Faith knows God sets them not on to go off untouched. It is though an humble yet a bold grace, because it knows it cannot be so bold with God in his own way as it is welcome.

USE OR APPLICATION.

[Unbelief hath the same pre-eminence among sins, as faith 'above all' graces.]

Use First. Is faith the chief of graces? This may help us to conceive of the horrible nature of unbelief. This surely will deserve as high a place among sins as faith hath among the graces. Unbelief! It is the Beelzebub, the prince of sins. As faith is the radical grace, so is unbelief a radical sin, a sinning sin. As of all sinners, those are most infamous who are ringleaders and make others sin—which is the brand that God hath set upon Jeroboam's name, 'Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin,' 1 Kings 14:16—so among sins, they are most horrid that are most productive of other sins. Such a one is unbelief above any other. It is a ring-leading sin, a sin-making sin. The first poisonous breath which Eve sucked in from the tempter was sent in the words, 'Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?' Gen. 3:1. As if he had said, 'Consider well on the matter. Do you believe God meant so? Can you think so ill of God as to believe he would keep the best fruit of the whole garden from you?' This was the traitor's gate, at which all other sins entered into her heart; and it continues of the same use to Satan to this day, for the hurrying souls into other sins—called therefore, 'an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God,' Heb. 3:12. The devil sets up this sin of unbelief as a blind betwixt the sinner and God, that the shot which come from the threatening, and are levelled at the sinner's breast, may not may not be dre aded and feared by him. And then the wretch can be as bold with his lust, as the pioneer is at his work, when once he hath got his basket of earth between him and the enemies' bullets. Nay, this unbelief doth not only choke the bullets of wrath which are sent out of the law's fiery mouth, but it damps the motions of

grace which come from the gospel. All the offers of love which God makes to an unbelieving heart, they fall like seed into dead earth, or, like sparks into a river, they are out as soon as they fall into it.

‘The word’—it is said—‘did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it,’ Heb. 4:2. The strength of this whole body of sin lies in this lock of unbelief. There is no mastering of a sinner while unbelief is in power. This will carry all arguments away, whether they be from law or gospel, that are pressed upon him, as easily as Samson did the doors, posts, with bar and all, from the city of Gaza, Judges 16:2. It is a sin that doth keep the field—one of the last of all the others; that which the sinner is last convinced of, and the saint ordinarily last conqueror of. It is one of the chief strengths and fastnesses unto which the devil retreats when other sins are routed. O how oft do we hear a poor sinner confess and bewail other sins he hath lived in formerly, with brinish tears, but will not hearken yet to the offer of mercy in Christ. Bid him believe on Christ, and he shall be saved—which was the doctrine Paul and Silas preached to the trembling jailor, Acts 16:31—alas! he dares not, he will not; you can hardly persuade him it is his duty to do so. The devil hath now betaken himself to this city of gates and bars, where he stands upon his guard; and, the more strongly to fortify himself in it, he hath the most specious pretenses for it of any other sin. It is a sin that he makes the humbled soul commit out of fear of sinning, and so stabs the good name of God, for fear of dishonouring him by a saucy presumptuous faith. Indeed it is a sin by which Satan intends to put the greatest scorn upon God, and unfold all his cankered malice against him at once. It is by faith that the saints ‘have obtained a good report.’ Yea, it is by the saints’ faith that God hath a good report in the world. And, by unbelief, the devil doth his worst to raise an evil report of God in the world; as if he were not what his own promise and his saints’ faith witness him to be. In a word, it is a sin that hell gapes for of all the others.

There are two sins that claim a pre-eminence in hell—hypocrisy and unbelief; and therefore other sinners are threatened to ‘have their portion with the hypocrites,’ Matt. 24:51, and ‘with unbelievers,’ Luke 12:46; as if those infernal mansions were taken up principally for these, and all others were but inferior

prisoners. But of the two unbelief is the greater, and that which may, with an emphasis, be called above this or any other, ‘the damning sin.’ ‘He that believeth not is condemned already,’ John 3:18. He hath his mittimus already to jail; yea, he is in it already in a sense—he hath the brand of a damned person on him. The Jews are said, Rom. 11:32, to be shut up ‘in unbelief.’ A surer prison the devil cannot keep a sinner in. Faith shuts the soul up in the promise of life and happiness, as God shut Noah into the ark. It is said, ‘the Lord shut him in,’ Gen. 7:16. Thus faith shuts the soul up in Christ, and the ark of his covenant, from all fear of danger from heaven or hell; and [thus too,] on the contrary, unbelief shuts a soul up in guilt and wrath, that there is no more possibility for an unbeliever of escaping damnation, than for one to escape burning that is shut up in a fiery oven. No help can come to the sinner so long as this bolt of unbelief is on the door of his heart. As our salvation is attributed to faith, rather than to other graces—though none [be] wanting in a saved person—so sinners’ damnation and ruin is attributed to their unbelief, though the other sins [are] found with it in the person damned. The Spirit of God passeth over the Jews’ hypocrisy, murmuring, rebellion, and lays their destruction at the door of this one sin of unbelief. ‘They could not enter in because of unbelief,’ Heb. 3:19.

O sinners!—you who live under the gospel I mean—if you perish, know beforehand what is your undoing—it is your unbelief that does it. If a malefactor that is condemned to die be offered his life by the judge upon reading a psalm of mercy, and he reads not, we may say his not reading hangs him. The promise of the gospel is this psalm of mercy, which God offers in his son to law-condemned sinners. Believing is reading this psalm of mercy. If thou believest not and are damned, thou goest to hell rather for thy final unbelief than any of thy other sins, for which a discharge is offered thee upon thy receiving Christ and believing on him. Let this cause us all to rise up against this sin, as the Philistines did against Samson, whom they called the destroyer of their country,’ Judges 16:24. This is the destroyer of your souls, and that is worse; yea, it destroys them with a bloodier hand than other sins do that are not aggravated with this. We find two general heads of indictments upon

which the whole world of sinners shall be condemned at the great day, II Thes. 1:8. There Christ's coming to judgment is expressed; and those miserable undone creatures that shall fall under his condemning sentence, are comprised in these two [classes]—such as 'know not God,' and such as 'obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ.' The heathens' negative unbelief of the gospel shall not be charged upon them, because they never had it preached to them. No; they shall be sent to hell for 'not knowing God,' and so shall escape with a lighter damnation by far, than Jews or Christian Gentiles to whom the gospel hath been preached—though to some of these with a stronger and longer continued beam of light than [has been the lot of] others. The dismal charge which shall be brought against these will be, that they have not obeyed the gospel of our Lord Jesus; that is, not believed on Christ—called therefore the 'obedience of faith,' Rom. 16:26. And certainly, we cannot but think that there shall be a torment proper to these gospel refusers, which those that never had the offer of grace shall not feel, in hell. And among those that obey not the gospel the greatest vengeance waits for them that have had the longest and most passionate treaty of mercy allowed them. These are they that put God to the greatest expense of mercy, and therefore they must necessarily expect the greatest proportion of wrath and vengeance to be measured to them; yea, their unbelief puts Christ, and the grace of God in him, to the greatest shame and scorn that is possible for creatures to do; and it is but righteous that God should therefore put their unbelief and themselves with it to the greatest shame before men and angels, of any other sinners.

[Reasons why we should be serious
in the TRIAL OF OUR FAITH.]

Use Second. Is faith the chief of graces? Let this make us the more curious and careful that we be not cheated in our faith. There are some things of so inconsiderable worth, that they will not pay us for the pains and care we take about them; and there to be choice and scrupulous is folly; to be negligent and incurious is wisdom. But there are other things of such worth and weighty consequence, that none but he that means to call his wisdom in question can be

willing to be mistaken and cozened in them. Who that is wise would pay as for a precious stone, and have a pebble, or at best a Bristol-stone, put upon him for his money? Who, when his life is at stake, and knows no way to save it but by getting some one rich drug which is very scarce, but to be had, would not be very careful to have the right? O my dear friends, doth it not infinitely more concern you to be careful in your merchandise for this pearl of precious faith? Can you be willing to take the devil's false sophisticated ware off his hand? a mock faith which he would cheat you with, rather than obtain the 'faith unfeigned,' which God hath to give unto his children—called therefore the 'faith of God's elect?' Will the devil's drugs, that are sure to kill thee, serve thy turn, when thou art offered by God himself a rich drug that will cure thee? When thou goest to buy a garment, thou askest for the best piece of stuff of cloth in the shop. In the market thou wouldst have the best meat for thy belly; when with the lawyer the best counsel for thy estate; and of the physician the best directions for thy health. Art thou for the best in all but for thy soul? Wouldst thou not have a faith of the best kind also? If a man receives false money, who doth he wrong but himself? and if thou beest gulled with a false faith, the loss is thy own, and that no small one. Thyself will think so when thou comest to the bar, and God shall bid thee either pay the debt thou owest him, or go to rot and roar in hell's prison. Then how wilt thou be confounded! When thou producest thy faith and hopest to save thyself with this—that thou believest on the Lord Jesus—but shalt have thy confidence rejected, and God tell thee to thy teeth it is not faith but a lie in thy right hand that thou hast got, and therefore he will not accept the payment, though it be Christ himself that offerest to lay down; nay, that he will give thee up into the tormentor's hand, and that not only for believing, but also for counterfeiting the King of heaven's coin, and setting his name on thy false money; which thou dost by pretending to faith, when it is a false one thou hast in thy bosom. This were enough to awaken your care in the trial of your faith, but to give some further weight to the exhortation we shall cast in these three conditions.

1. Reason. Consider that as thy faith is, so are all thy other graces. As a man's marriage is so are all his children, legitimate, or illegitimate. Thus, as our

marriage is to Christ, so all our graces are. Now, it is faith by which we are married to Christ. 'I have espoused you to one husband,' saith Paul to the Corinthians, II Cor. 11:2. How, but by their faith? It is faith whereby the soul gives its consent to take Christ for her husband. Now, if our faith be false, then our marriage to Christ is feigned; and if that be feigned, then all our pretended graces are base-born. How goodly soever an outside they have—as a bastard may have a fair face—they are all illegitimate; our humility, patience, temperance—all bastards. And, you know, 'a bastard was not to enter into the congregation,' Deut. 23:2. No more shall any bastard grace enter into the congregation of the just in heaven. He that hath children of his own will not make another's bastard his heir. God hath children of his own to inherit heaven's glory, in whose hearts he hath by his own Spirit begotten those heavenly graces which do truly resemble his own holy nature; surely he will never settle it upon strangers, counterfeit believers, that are the devil's brats and by-blows.

2. Reason. Consider the excellency of true faith makes false faith so much the more odious. Because a king's son is an extraordinary personage, therefore it is so high a crime for an ignoble person to counterfeit himself to be such a one. It is by that we 'become the sons of God,' John 1:12. And what a high presumption is it then that, by a false faith, thou committest? Thou pretendedst to be a child of God, when no heaven-blood runs in thy veins, but hast more reason to look for thy kindred in hell and derive thy pedigree from Satan. This passeth for no less than blasphemy in the account of the Scripture. 'I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan,' Rev. 2:9. God loathes such with his heart. A false friend is worse than an open enemy in man's judgment; and a hypocritical Judas more abhorred by God than a bloody Pilate. Either, therefore, get true faith, or pretend to none. The ape, because he hath the face of a man, but not the soul of a man, is therefore the most ridiculous of all creatures. And of all sinners, none will be put more to shame at the last day than such as have aped and imitated the believer in some exterior postures of profession, but never had the spirit of a believer so as to perform one vital act of faith. The psalmist tells us of some whose 'image' God will 'despise,' Ps. 73:20. It

is spoken chiefly of the wicked man's temporary prosperity—which, for its short continuance, is compared to the image or representation of a thing in the fancy of a sleeping man, that then is busy and pleased us with many fine pleasing objects, but all are lost when our sleep leaves us—this God will despise at the great day; when he shall not give heaven and glory by the estates and honours that men had in the world, but tumble them down to hell if graceless, as well as the poorest beggar in the world. But, there is another sort of persons whose image God will at that day despise more than these, and that is the image of all temporary believers and unsound professors, who have a fantastical faith, which they set up like an image in their imaginations, and dance about it with as many self-pleasing thoughts as a man doth that is dreaming himself to be some great prince; but this great idol shall then be broken, and the worshippers of it hissed down to hell with the greatest shame of any other.

3. Reason. Consider that none stand at greater disadvantage for the obtaining of a true faith than he who flatters himself with a false one. 'Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him,' Prov. 26:12, that is, there is more hope of persuading him. Of all fools the conceited fool is the worst. Pride makes a man incapable of receiving counsel. Nebuchadnezzar's mind is said to be 'hardened in pride,' Dan. 5:20. There is no reasoning with a proud man. He castles himself in his own opinion of himself, and there stands upon his defence against all arguments that are brought. Bid a conceited professor labour for faith, or he is undone; and the man will tell you that you mistake and knock at the wrong door. It is the ignorant person, or profane, you should go to on the errand. He thanks God he is not now to seek for a faith, and thus blesseth himself in his good condition, when God knows 'he feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?' Isa. 44:20. The ignorant profane person, like the psalmist's 'man of low degree,' is plain 'vanity.' It is not hard to make themselves to acknowledge as much as that they have nothing, deserve nothing, can look for nothing as they are but hell and damnation. But, such as pretend to faith, and content themselves with a false one, they are like

the ‘men of high degree’ ‘a lie,’ which is vanity as well as the other, but with a specious cover over it that hides it. Therefore the devil is forward enough to put poor silly souls on believing, that he may forestall, if he can, the Spirit’s market, and prevent the creature’s obtaining of a true faith, by cheating of it with a counterfeit. It is like the wicked policy of Jeroboam, who, to keep the Israelites from going to Jerusalem, and hankering after the true worship of God there, set up something like a religious worship nearer hand, at home, in the ‘golden calves;’ and this pleased many well enough, that they missed not their walk to Jerusalem. O friends, take heed therefore of being cheated with a false faith. Every one, I know, would have the living child to be hers and not the dead one. We would all pass for such as have the true faith and not the false. But, be not your own judges; appeal to the Spirit of God, and let him, with the sword of his word, come and decide the controversy. Which faith is thine, the true or false?

SECOND BRANCH.

‘THE SHIELD OF FAITH’ itself, and how its truth may be judged of.

By this time, possibly, you may be solicitous to know what your faith is, and how you may come to judge of the truth of it. Now for your help therein, take these TWO DIRECTIONS. One, taken from the manner of the Spirit’s working faith; the other, from the properties of faith, when it is wrought.

[The manner of the Spirit’s working faith.]

FIRST DIRECTION. We know what faith is, and how to judge of it, from the manner of the Spirit’s working it in the soul. It is incomparably the greatest work that passeth upon the soul from the Spirit of Christ; it is called the *ὑπερβάλλων μέγεθος τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ*—‘The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe,’ Eph. 1:19. Oh, observe with what a heap of expressions the Spirit of God loads our weak understandings, that labouring under the weight of them, and finding the difficulty of reaching the significancy of them, we might be the more

widened to conceive of that power which can never be fully understood by us—being indeed infinite, and so too big to be inclosed within the narrow walls of our understandings—power,’ ‘greatness of power,’ ‘exceeding greatness,’ and lastly, ‘exceeding greatness of his power,’ that is, of God. What angel in heaven can tell us what all these amount to? God, with reverence be it spoken, sets his whole force to this work. It is compared to no less than ‘the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power,’ Eph. 1:20,21. To raise anyone from the dead is a mighty, an almighty work; but to raise Christ from the dead, carries more wonder with it than to raise any other. He had a heavier grave-stone to keep him down than any besides—the weight of a world’s sin lay upon him—yet notwithstanding this he is raised with power by the Spirit, not only out of the grave, but into glory. Now the power God puts forth upon the soul in working faith, is according to this of raising Christ, for, indeed, the sinner’s soul is as really dead in sin as Christ’s body was in the grave for sin. Now, speak, poor creature, art thou any way acquainted with such a power of God to have been at work in thee? or dost thou think slightly of believing, and so show thyself a stranger to this mystery? Certainly, this one thing might resolve many—if they desired to know their own state—that they have no faith, because they make faith so trivial and light a matter, as if they were as easy to believe as to say they do; and it were of no more difficulty to receive Christ into their souls by faith, than to put a bit of bread into their mouths with their hand. Ask some, whether ever such a day or time of God’s power came over their heads, to humble them for sin, drive them out of themselves, and draw them effectually unto Christ? And they may answer you as those did Peter, when he asked—‘Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost,’ Acts 19:2. So these might say, ‘We know not whether there be any such power required to the working of faith or no.’ But to descend into a more particular consideration of this powerful work of the Spirit upon the soul for the production of faith, it will be necessary to consider—O what posture the Spirit of Christ

finds the soul in before he begins this great work! and then how he makes his addresses to the soul, and what acts he puts forth upon the soul for the working faith.

First. The posture of the soul when the Spirit begins his great work of grace in it. The Spirit finds the creature in such a state as it neither can, nor will, contribute the least help to the work. As the ‘prince of the world,’ when he came to tempt Christ, ‘found nothing in him’ to befriend and further his tempting design; so, when the Spirit of Christ comes, he finds as little encouragement from the sinner. No party within the castle of the soul to side with him when he comes first to set down before it, and lay siege to it, but all the powers of the whole man in arms against him! Hence it is that so many scornful answers are sent out to the summons that are given sinners to yield. ‘He came unto his own, and his own received him not,’ John 1:11. Never was a garrison more resolved to stand out against both the treaties and batteries of an assailing enemy, than the carnal heart is all means that God useth to reduce it into his obedience. The noblest operations of the soul, they are ‘earthly, sensual, devilish,’ James 3:15, so that except heaven and earth can meet—sensual and spiritual please one palate, God and the devil agree—there is no hope that a sinner of himself should like the motion that Christ makes, or that with any argument he should be won over to like it, so long as the ground of dislike remains in his earthly, sensual, and devilish nature.

Second. We proceed to show how the Spirit makes his addresses to the soul, and what acts he puts forth upon it for the working faith. Now the Spirit’s address is suited to the several facilities of the soul, the principal of which are these three, understanding, conscience, and will. These are like three forts, one within the other, which must all be reduced before the town be taken—the sinner, I mean, subdued to the obedience of faith—and to these the Spirit makes his particular addresses, putting forth an act of almighty power upon every one of them, and that in this order.

[The Spirit’s particular addresses to the soul, when working faith in it.]

1. The Spirit makes his approach to the under-

standing, and on it he puts forth an act of illumination. The Spirit will not work in a dark shop; the first thing he doth in order to faith, is to beat out a window in the soul, and let in some light from heaven into it. Hence, believers are said to be ‘renewed in the spirit of their minds,’ Eph. 4:23, which the same apostle calleth being ‘renewed in knowledge,’ Col. 3:10. By nature we know little of God, and nothing of Christ or the way of salvation by him. The eye of the creature therefore must be opened to see the way of life, before he can by faith get into it. God doth not use to waft souls to heaven, like passengers in a ship, who are shut under the hatches, and see nothing all the way they are sailing to their port. If [it had been] so, that prayer might have been spared which the psalmist, inspired of God, breathes forth in the behalf of the blind Gentiles ‘That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations,’ Ps. 67:2. As faith is not a naked assent without affianc³ and innitency⁴ on Christ; so neither is it a blind assent without some knowledge. If, therefore, thou continuest still in thy brutish ignorance, and knowest not so much as who Christ is, and what he hath done for the salvation of poor sinners, and what thou must do to get interest in him, thou art far enough from believing. If the day be not broken in thy soul, much less is the Sun of righteousness arisen by faith in thy soul.

2. Again, when the Spirit of God hath sprung with a divine light into the understanding, then he makes his address to the conscience, and the act which passeth upon that is an act of conviction; ‘he shall convince the world of sin,’ &c, John 16:8. Now this conviction is nothing but a reflection of the light that is in the understanding upon the conscience whereby the creature feels the weight and force of those truths he knows, so as to be brought into a deep sense of them. Light in a direct beam heats not, nor doth knowledge swimming in the brain affect. Most under the gospel know that unbelief is a damning sin, and that there is ‘no name’ to be saved by but the name of Christ; yet how few of those know this convincingly, so as to apply it to their own consciences,

3. Affiance, trust or faith. — SDB

4. Innitency, act of leaning on.

and to be affected with their own deplored state, who are the unbelievers and Christless persons? As he is a convicted drunkard in law, who, in open court, or before a lawful authority, upon clear testimony and deposition of witnesses, is found and judged to be such; so he, scripturally, is a convinced sinner, who, upon the clear evidence of the word brought against him by the Spirit, is found by his own conscience—God’s officer in his bosom—to be so. Speak now, poor creature, did ever such an act of the Spirit of God pass upon thee as this is? which that thou mayest the better discern of, try thyself by these few characters of a convinced person.

(1.) A sinner truly convinced is not only convinced of this sin or that sin, but of the evil of all sin. It is an ill sign when a person seems in a passion to cry out of one sin, and to be senseless of another sin. A parboiled conscience is not right, soft in one part, and hard in another. The Spirit of God is uniform in its work.

(2.) The convinced sinner is not only convinced of acts of sin, but of the state of sin also. He is not only affected [by] what he hath done—this law broken, and that mercy abused by him—but with what his state and present condition is. Peter leads Simon Magus from that one horrid act he committed to the consideration of that which was worse—the dismal state that he discovered him to be in. ‘I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity,’ Acts 8:23. Many will confess they do not do as they should, who will not think by any means so ill of themselves that their state is naught—a state of sin and death; whereas the convinced soul freely puts himself under this sentence of death, owns his condition, and dissembles not his pedigree. ‘I am a most vile wretch,’ saith he, ‘a limb of Satan, full of sin as the toad is of rank poison. My whole nature lies in wickedness, even as the dead rotten carcass doth its slime and putrefaction. I am a child of wrath, born to no other inheritance than hell-flames; and if God will now tread me down thither, I have not one righteous syllable to object against his proceedings, but there is that in my own conscience which will clear him from having done me any wrong in my doom.’

(3.) The convinced sinner doth not only condemn himself for what he hath done and is, but he despairs of himself as to anything he can now do to

save himself. Many, though they go so far as to confess they are vile wretches, and have lived wickedly, and for this deserve to die; yet, when they have put the rope around their neck by a self-condemning act, they are so far from being convinced of their own impotency, that they hope to cut the rope with their repentance, reformation, and I know not what bundle of good works, which they think shall redeem their credit with God and recover his favour, which their former sins have unhappily lost them. And this comes to pass, because the plough of conviction did not go deep enough to tear up those secret roots of self-confidence with which the heart of every sinner is woefully tainted. Whereas every soul, thoroughly convinced by the Spirit, is a self-despairing soul; he sees himself beyond his own help, like a poor condemned prisoner, laden with so many heavy irons, that he sees it is impossible for him to make an escape, with all his skill or strength, out of the hands of justice. O friends! look whether the work be gone thus far in your souls or no. Most that perish, it is not their disease that kills them, but their physician. They think to cure themselves, and this leaves them incurable. Speak, soul, did the Lord ever ferret thee out of this burrow where so many earth themselves? Art thou as much at a loss what to do, as sensible for what thou hast done? Dost thou see hell in thy sin and despair in thyself? Hath God got thee out of this Keilah, and convinced thee if thou wouldst stay in the self-confidence of thy repentance, reformation, and duties, they would all deliver thee up into the hands of God’s justice and wrath, when they shall come against thee? Then, indeed, thou hast escaped one of the finest snares that the wit of hell can weave.

(4.) The convinced sinner is not only convinced of sin, so as to condemn himself, and despair of himself, but he is convinced of a full provision laid up in Christ for self-condemned and self-despairing ones. ‘He shall convince the world of sin, and of righteousness,’ John 16:9, 10. And this is as necessary an antecedent for faith as any of the former. Without this, the soul convinced of sin is more like to go to the gallows with Judas, or fall on the sword of the law—as the jailer attempted to do on his when he thought his condition desperate—than think of coming to Christ. Who will go to his door that hath not wherewithal to relieve him?

3. The third and last faculty to be dealt with is the will, and on this, for the production of faith, the Spirit puts forth an act of renovation, whereby he doth sweetly, but powerfully, incline the will, which before was rebellious and refractory, to accept of Christ, and make a free deliberate choice of him for his Lord and Saviour. I say a 'free' choice, not only cudgelled into him with apprehensions of wrath, as one may run under an enemy's pent-house in a storm, whose door he would have passed by in fair weather, and never looked that way. Speak, soul, dost thou please thyself in choosing Christ? dost thou go to Christ, not only for safety, but delight? So the spouse: 'I sat under his shadow with great delight,' Song 2:3. I say a 'deliberate' choice, wherein the soul well weighs the terms Christ is offered on, and when it hath considered all seriously, likes them, and closeth with him. Like [as it was with] Ruth, who when Naomi spake the worst she could to discourage her, yet liked her mother's company too well to lose it for those troubles that attended her. Speak, soul, hath the Spirit of God thus put his golden key into the lock of thy will, to open the everlasting door of thy heart to let Christ the King of glory in? Hath he not only opened the eye of thy understanding, as he awaked Peter asleep in prison, and caused the chains of senselessness and stupidity to fall off thy conscience, but also opened the iron gate of thy will, to let thee out of the prison of impenitency, where even now thou wert fast bolted in; yea, brought thee to knock at heaven-door for entertainment, as Peter did at the house of Mary, where the church was met. Be of good comfort, thou mayest know assuredly that God hath sent, not his angel, but his own Spirit, and hath delivered thee out of the hand of sin, Satan, and justice.

[THE PROPERTIES OF TRUE FAITH,
when it is wrought.]

SECOND DIRECTION. We know what faith is, and how to judge of it, from its properties when it is wrought in us buy the Spirit. We shall content ourselves by noticing three. First. True faith is obediential. Second. It is prayerful. Third. It is uniform in its acting.

[True faith is OBEDIENTIAL.]

First Property. This choice excellent faith is an obediential faith; that is, true faith on the promise works obedience to the command. Abraham is famous for his obedience; no command, how difficult soever, came amiss to him. He is an obedient servant indeed, that, when he doth but hear his master knock with his foot, leaves all and runs presently to know his master's will and pleasure. Such a servant had God of Abraham: 'Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot,' Isa. 41:2. But what was the spring that set Abraham's obedience a going? See for this, Heb. 11:8 'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.' As it is impossible to please God without faith, so it is impossible not to desire to please God with faith. It may well go for an idol faith, that hath hands but doth not work, feet, but doth not walk in the statutes of God. No sooner had Christ cured the woman in the gospel of her fever, but it is said, 'She arose, and ministered unto them,' Matt. 8:15. Thus the believing soul stands up and ministers unto Christ in gratitude and obedience. Faith is not lazy; it inclines not the soul to sleep, but work; it sends the creature not to bed, there to snort away his time in ease and sloth, but into the field. The night of ignorance and unbelief, that was the creature's sleeping time; but, when the Sun of righteousness ariseth, and it is day in the soul, then the creature riseth and goeth forth to his labour. The first words that break out faith's lips, are those of Saul in his hour of conversion: 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' Acts 9:6. Faith turns the Jordan, and alters the whole course of a man. 'We were,' saith the apostle, 'foolish' and 'disobedient,' 'but after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,' Titus 3:3, 4, then the case was altered, as it follows. And, therefore, take your foul fingers off the promise, and pretend no more to faith, if ye be children of Belial—such whose necks do not freely stoop to this yoke of obedience. The devil himself may as soon pass for a believer as a disobedient soul. Other things he can show as much as you. Dost thou pretend to knowledge? thou wilt not deny the devil to be a greater scholar than thyself, I hope, and that in

Scripture knowledge. Dost thou believe the Scripture to be true? and doth not he more strongly? Dost thou tremble? he much more. It is obedience he wants, and this makes him a devil, and it will make thee like him also.

[Two characters distinguishing true faith's obedience.]

Question. But, you may ask, what stamp is there to be found on faith's obedience which will distinguish it from all counterfeits—for there are many fair semblances of obedience, which the devil will never grudge us the having?

Answer. Take these two characters of the obedience of faith.

1. Character. Faith's obedience begins at the heart, and from thence it diffuseth and dilates itself to the outward man, till it overspreads the whole man in a sincere endeavour. As in natural life, the first part that lives in the heart, so the first that faith subdues into obedience is the heart. It is called a 'faith which purifieth the heart,' Acts 15:9. And the believing Romans 'obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to them,' Rom. 6:17. Whereas a false faith, which apes this true faith—as art imitates nature—begins without, and there ends. All the seeming good works of a counterfeit believer, they are like the beautiful colour in a picture's face, which comes not from a principle of life within, but the painter's pencil without. Such were those, John 2:23, who are said to 'believe on Christ,' 'but Jesus did not commit himself unto them,' ver. 24. And why? 'for he knew what was in man,' ver. 25. He cared not for the painted porch and goodly outside: 'for he knew what was in man,' and by that knowledge he knew them to be rotten at core, naught at heart, before they were specked on the skin of their exterior conversation.

Question (1.) But how may I know my obedience is the obedience of the heart?

Answer. If it comes from love then it is the obedience of the heart. He commands the heart that is the master of its love. The castle must needs yield when he that keeps it, and hath the keys of it, submits. Love is the affection that governs this royal fort of man's heart. We give our hearts to them we give our love to. And indeed thus it is that faith brings the

heart over into subjection and obedience to God, by putting it under a law of love; 'faith worketh by love,' Gal. 5:6. First, faith worketh love, and then it worketh by it. As first the workman sets an edge on his tools, and then carves and cuts with them; so faith sharpens the soul's love to God, and then acts by it. Or, as a statuary, to make some difficult piece, before he goes about it, finding his hands numb with cold, that he cannot handle his tools so nimbly as he should, goes first to the fire, and, with the help of its heat, chafes them till they of stiff and numb become agile and active, then to work he falls; so faith brings the soul—awk and listless enough, God knows, to any duty—unto the meditation of the peerless, matchless love of God in Christ to it; and at this fire faith stays the Christian's thoughts till his affections begin to kindle and come to some sense of this love of God, and now the Christian bestirs himself for God with might and main.

Question (2.) But how may I know my obedience is from love?

Answer. I will send to St. John to be resolved of this question, 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous,' I John 5:3. Speak, soul, what account have you of the commandments? Do you look upon them as an iron chain about your legs, and think yourselves prisoners because you are tied to them? or do you value them as a chain of gold about your neck, and esteem yourselves favourites of the King of heaven, that he will honour you to honour him by serving of him? So did as great a prince as the world had: 'Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly,' I Chr. 29. Not, 'Who am I, that I should be a king over my people?' but 'that I should have a heart so gracious to offer willingly with my people.' Not, 'Who am I, that they should serve me?' but, 'that thou wilt honour me with a heart to serve thee with them?' The same holy man in another place speak of sin as his prison, and his obedience as his liberty: 'I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts,' Ps. 119:45. When God gives him a large heart for duty, he is as thankful as a man that was bound in prison is when he is set at liberty, that he may visit his friends and follow his calling. The only grievous thing to a loving soul is to be hindered in his obedience. This is that which makes such a one out

of love with the world, and with being in it —because it cumpers him in his work, and many times keeps him from it. As a conscionable faithful servant, that is lame or sickly, and can do his master little service, O how it grieves him! Thus the loving soul bemoans itself, that it should put God to so much cost, and be so unprofitable under it. Speak, is this thy temper? Blessed art thou of the Lord! There is a jewel of two diamonds, which this will prove thou art owner of, that the crown-jewels of all the princes of the world are not so worthy to be valued with, as a heap of dust or dung is to be compared with them. The jewel I mean, is made of this pair of graces —faith and love. They are thine, and, with them, God and all that he hath and is. But, if the commandments if the commandments of God be ‘grievous,’ as they are to every carnal heart, and thou countest thyself at ease when thou canst make an escape from a duty to commit a sin, as the beast doth when his collar is off and he in his fat pasture again; now thou art where thou wouldst be, and can show some spirits that thou hast. But when conscience puts on the trace again, thou art dull and heavy again. O, it speaks thee to have no love to God, and therefore no faith on God, that is true. That is a jade indeed who hath no mettle but in the pasture.

2. Character. The obedience of faith is full of self-denial. Faith keeps the creature low; as in what he hath, so he doth. ‘I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,’ Gal. 2:20. As if he had said, ‘I pray, mistake me not; when I say, ‘I live,’ I mean, not that I live by myself, but Christ in me. I live, and that deliciously, but it is Christ that keeps the house, not I. I mortify my corruptions, and vanquish temptations, but I am debtor to Christ for the strength.’ None can write here, as one did under Pope Adrian’s statue —where the place of his birth was named, and those princes that had preferred him from step to step till he mounted the pope’s chair, but God left out of all the story—‘nihil hic Deus fecit’—God did nothing for this man. No, blessed Paul, and in him every believer, acknowledgeth God for sole founder, and benefactor too, of all the good he hath and doth. They are not ashamed to acknowledge who they are beholden to for all. ‘These are the children which God hath graciously given me,’ said Jacob. And these the services which God hath graciously assisted me in,

saith Paul; ‘I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me,’ 1 Cor. 15:10. All is ex dono Dei—from the gift of God. O how chary are saints of writing themselves the authors of their own good works, parts, or abilities! ‘Art thou able,’ said the king to Daniel, ‘to make known unto me the dream which I have seen?’ Dan. 2:26. Now mark, he doth not say, as the proud astrol-ogers, ‘We will show the interpretation,’ Dan. 2:4. That fitted their mouths well enough who had no acquaintance with God, but not Daniel’s—the servant of the living God. Though at the very time he had the secret revealed to him and could tell the king his dream, yet he was careful to stand clear from any fil-ching of God’s glory from him; and therefore he answers the king by telling him what his God could do rather than himself. ‘There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets,’ &c. And what makes Daniel so self-denying? Truly it was because he had obtained this secret of God by faith at the throne of grace; as you may perceive by chapter 2:15-17 compared. That faith which taught him to beg the mercy of God, enabled him to deny himself, and give the entire glory of it from himself to God. As rivers empty their streams again into the bosom of the sea, whence they at first received them; so men give the praise of what they do unto that by which they do it. If they attempt any enterprise with their own wit or industry, you shall have them bring their sacrifice to their wit or net. No wonder to hear Nebuchadnezzar—who looked no higher than himself in building his great Babylon—scribe the honour of it to himself, ‘Is not this great Babylon, that I have built...by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?’ Dan. 4:30. But faith teacheth the creature to blot out his own name, and write the name of God in its room, upon all he hath and doth. When the servants came to give up their accounts to their Lord, every one for his pound; those that were faithful to improve it how humbly and self-denyingly do they speak! ‘Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds,’ saith the first, Luke 19:16. ‘Thy pound hath gained five,’ saith another, ver. 18. Mark, not ‘I have gained,’ but, ‘thy pound hath gained ten and five.’ They do not applaud themselves, but ascribe both principal and increase to God; thy talent hath gained, that is, thy gifts and grace, through thy assistance and blessing, have

gained thus much more. Only he that did least comes in with a brag, and tells his Lord what he had done. 'Behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin.' Least doers are greatest boasters.

[True faith is PRAYERFUL.]

Second Property. True faith is prayerful. Prayer, it is the child of faith; and as the child bears his father's name upon him, so doth prayer the name of faith. What is it known by but by 'the prayer of faith?' James 5:15. Prayer, it is the very natural breath of faith. Supplication and thanksgiving—the two parts of prayer—by these, as the body by the double motion of the lungs, doth the Christian suck in mercy from God, and breathe back again that mercy in praise to God. But, without faith he could do neither; he could not by supplication draw mercy from God; 'for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him,' Heb. 11:6. Neither could he return praises to God without faith. David's heart must be fixed before he can sing and give thanks, Ps. 56. Thanksgiving is an act of self-denial, and it is faith alone that will show us the way out of our own doors; and as the creature cannot pray—I mean acceptably—without faith, so with faith he cannot but pray. The new creature, like our infants in their natural birth, comes crying into the world; and therefore Christ tells it for great news to Ananias of Saul, a new-born believer, 'Behold he prayeth.' But is that so strange, that one brought up at the foot of Gamaliel, and so precise a Pharisee as he was, should be found upon his knees at prayer? Truly no, it was that his sect gloried in—their fasting and praying—and therefore, he, being strict in his way, was no doubt acquainted with this work as to the exterior part of it, but he never had the spirit of prayer, till he now had the Spirit of grace, whereby he believed on Jesus Christ. And therefore, if you will try your faith, it must not be by bare praying, but by some peculiar characters which faith imprints prayer withal. Now there are three acts by which faith discovers itself in reference to this duty of prayer. 1. Faith puts forth an exciting act, whereby it stirs up the Christian to pray. 2. Faith hath an assisting act in prayer. 3. Faith hath a supporting act after prayer.

[Three acts by which faith discovers itself in reference to prayer.]

1. Act. Faith puts forth an exciting act, whereby it provokes the Christian and strongly presseth him to pray. And this it doth,

(1.) By discovering to the creature his own beggary and want, as also the fulness that is to be had from God in Christ for his supply—both which faith useth as powerful motives to quicken the soul up to pray. As the lepers said to one another, 'Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: come, and let us fall into the host of the Syrians,' II Kings 7:3, 4. Thus faith rouseth up the soul to prayer. If thou stayest at thy own door, O my soul, thou art sure to starve and die. What seest thou in thyself but hunger and famine? No bread there; no money to buy any in thy own purse. Up therefore, haste thee to thy God, and thy soul shall live. O sirs, are you pressed with this inward feeling of your own wants? Press to the throne of grace as the only way left for your supply. You may hope it is faith that sends you. Faith is the principle of our new life. 'I live,' said Paul, 'by the faith of the Son of God,' Gal. 2:20. This life being weak, is craving and crying for nourishment, and that naturally, as the new-born babe doth for the milk. If therefore you find this inward sense prompting and provoking of you to cry to God, it shows this principle of life—faith I mean—is in thee.

Objection. But, may not an unbeliever pray in the sense of his wants, and be inwardly pinched with them, which may make him pray very feelingly?

Answer. We must distinguish of wants. They are either spiritual or carnal. It cannot be denied, but an unbeliever may be very sensible of outward carnal wants, and knock loud at heaven-gate for supply. We find them 'howling on their beds, and assembling themselves for corn and wine,' Hosea 7:14. There is the cry of the creature, and the cry of the new creature. Every creature hath a natural cry for that which suits their nature. Hence, 'The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God,' Ps. 104:21. But, give the lion flesh, and he will not roar for want of grass; give the ox grass, and you shall not hear him lowing for flesh; so give the faithless, graceless person

his fill of his carnal food—sensual enjoyments—and you shall have little complaint of spiritual wants from him. They are therefore spiritual wants you must try your faith by. If thou canst heartily pray for love to Christ, faith on him, or any other grace—feeling the want of them, as a hungry man doth of his food—thou mayest conclude safely there is this principle of new life, which, like the veins at the bottom of the stomach, by its sucking, puts thee to pain till it be heard and satisfied; for these graces being proper to the new creature, can be truly desired of none but one that is a new creature.

(2.) Faith excites to prayer from an inward delight it hath in communion with God. 'It is good for me,' saith the psalmist, 'to draw near to God.' Now mark the next words, 'I have put my trust in the Lord,' Ps. 73:28. We take delight to be often looking where we have laid up our treasures. This holy man had laid up his soul, and all he had, in God, by faith, to be kept safely for him; and now he delights oft to be with God. He hath that which invites him into his presence with sweet content. By faith the soul is contracted to Christ. Now, being espoused to Christ, there is no wonder at all that it should desire communion with him. And prayer, being the place of meeting where Christ and the soul can come the nearest on this side of heaven, therefore the believer is seen so oft walking that way. Canst thou say, poor soul, that this is thy errand when praying—to see the face of God? Can nothing less, and needest thou nothing more to satisfy, and recreate thy soul in prayer, than communion with God? Certainly God hath thy faith, or else thou couldst not so freely bestow thy love on him and take delight in him.

2. Act. Faith puts forth an assisting act in prayer. To instance only in two particulars.

(1.) It assists the soul with importunity. Faith is the wrestling grace. It comes up close to God; takes hold of God, and will not easily take a denial. It inflames all the affections, and sets them on work. This is the soul's eye, by which it sees the filth, the hell, that is in every sin. And seeing affects the heart, and puts it into a passion of sorrow when the soul spreads its abominations before the Lord. The creature now needs no onion to make it weep. Tears come alone freely, as water from a flowing spring. It makes a discovery of Christ to the soul in the excellencies of his

person, love, and graces, from the glass of the promise, at the sight of which it is even sick with longing after them, and such pangs of love come upon it, as make it send forth strong cries and supplications for that it so impatiently desires. Yea, further, faith doth not barely set the creature's teeth on edge by displaying the excellency of Christ and his grace; but it supplies him with arguments, and helps the soul to wield and use them both valiantly and victoriously upon the Almighty. Never could he tell what to do with a promise in prayer, till now that faith teacheth him to press God with it, humbly, yet boldly. 'What wilt thou do unto thy great name?' Joshua 7:9. As if he had said, 'Thou art so fast bound to thy people by promise and oath, that thou canst not leave them to perish, but thy name will suffer with them.' Faith melts promises into arguments, as the soldier doth lead into bullets, and then helps the Christian to send them with a force to heaven in a fervent prayer; whereas a promise in an unbeliever's mouth is like a shot in a gun's mouth without any fire to put to it. O how cold and dead doth a promise drop from him in prayer! He speaks promises, but cannot pray promises or press promises. And therefore, try thyself not by naked praying, but by importunity in prayer; and that, not by the agitation of thy bodily spirits, but the inward working of thy soul and spirit, whether carried out to plead the promise and urge it upon God with an humble importunity, or not.

(2.) Faith enables the soul to persevere in the work. False faith may show some mettle at hand, but it will jade at length. Will the hypocrite pray always? Job 27:10. No; as the wheel wears with turning, till it breaks at last; so doth the hypocrite. He prays himself weary of praying. Something or other will in time make him quarrel with that duty which he never inwardly liked; whereas the sincere believer hath that in him which makes it impossible he should quite give over praying, except he should also cease believing. Prayer, it is the very breath of faith. Stop a man's breath, and where is he then? It is true the believer through his own negligence may find some more difficulty of fetching his prayer-breath at one time than at another—as a man in a cold doth for his natural breath. Alas! who is so careful of his soul's health that needs not to bewail this? But for faith to live, and this breath of prayer to be quite cut off, is impos-

sible. We see David did but hold his breath a little longer than ordinary, and what a distemper it put him into, till he gave himself ease again by venting his soul in prayer. 'I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue, Lord, make me to know mine end,' Ps. 39:2. Dost thou, O man, find thyself under a necessity of praying? As the little babe who cannot choose but cry when it ails or wants anything—because it hath no other way to help itself than by crying to hasten its mother or nurse to its help—[so] the Christian's wants, sins, and temptations continuing to return upon him, he cannot but continue also to pray against them. 'From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee,' saith David, Ps. 61:2. Wherever I am I will find thee out. Prison me, banish me, or do with me what thou wilt, thou shalt never be rid of me, 'I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever,' ver. 4. But how could David do that when banished from it? Surely he means by prayer. The praying Christian carries a 'tabernacle' with him. As long as David can come at the tabernacle he will not neglect it; and when he cannot through sickness, banishment, &c., then he will look towards it, and as devoutly worship God in the open fields as if he were in it. 'Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice,' Ps. 141:2. He speaks of such a time when he could not come to offer sacrifice at the tabernacle.

3. Act. Faith hath a supporting act after prayer.

(1.) It supports the soul to expect a gracious answer. 'I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up,' Ps. 5:3. Or, 'I will look' for what, but for a return? An unbelieving heart shoots at random, and never minds where his arrow lights, or what comes of his praying; but faith fill the soul with expectation. As a merchant, when he casts up his estate, counts what he hath sent beyond sea, as well as what he hath in hand; so doth faith reckon upon what he hath sent to heaven in prayer and not received, as well as those mercies which he hath received, and are in hand at present. Now this expectation which faith raiseth in the soul after prayer, appears in the power that it hath to quiet and compose the soul in the interim between the sending forth, as I may say, the ship of prayer, and its return home with its rich lading it goes for.

And it is more or less, according as faith's strength is. Sometimes faith comes from prayer in triumph, and cries victoria—victory. It gives such a being and existence to the mercy prayed for in the Christian's soul, before any likelihood of it appears to sense and reason, that the Christian can silence all his troubled thoughts with the expectation of its coming. So Hannah prayed, and 'was no more sad,' 1 Sam. 1:18. Yea, it will make the Christian disburse his praises for the mercy long before it is received. Thus high faith wrought in David, 'What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee;' and in the next words, 'In God I will praise his word,' Ps. 56:3, 4; that is, he would praise God for his promise, before there were any performance of it to him, when it had no existence but in God's faithfulness and David's faith. This holy man had such a piercing eye of faith, as he could see the promise, when he was at lowest ebb of misery, so certain and unquestionable in the power and truth of God, that he could then praise God, as if the promised mercy had actually been fulfilled to him. But I would not have thee, Christian, try the truth of thy faith by this heroic high strain it mounts to in some eminent believers. Thou mayest be a faithful soldier to Christ, though thou attainest not to the degree of a few worthies in his army, more honourable in this respect than the rest of their brethren.

(2.) There is a lower act of faith, which, if thou canst find, may certify thee of its truth: that, I mean, which, though it doth not presently, upon praying, disburden the soul of all its anxious disquieting thoughts, yet keeps the soul's head above their waves and gives a check to them, that they abate, though by little and little, as the stream in a channel doth at a falling tide. When God took the deluge from the earth, he did not do it in a moment. It is said, 'The waters returned from off the earth continually,' Gen. 8:3; that is, it was falling water from day to day, till all was gone. Canst thou not find, Christian, that some of thy tumultuous disquieting thoughts are let out at the sluice of prayer, and that it is some ease to thy encumbered spirit, that thou hast the bosom of a gracious God to empty thy sorrowful heart into? and, though praying doth not drain away all thy fears, yet it keeps thee, doth it not, from being overflowed with them, which thou couldst not avoid without faith? A soul wholly void of faith, prays, and leaves none of its

burden with God, but carries all back with it that it brought, and more too. Calling on God gives no more relief to him, than throwing out an anchor that hath no hooks to take hold on the firm earth, doth the sinking ship. If, therefore, poor soul, thou findest, upon throwing thy anchor of faith in prayer, that it takes such hold on Christ in the promise as to stay thee from being driven by the fury of Satan's affrighting temptations, or thy own despairing thoughts, bless God for it. The ship that rides at anchor is safe—though it may be a little tossed to and fro—so long as the anchor keeps its hold. And so art thou, poor soul. That faith will save from hell, that will not wholly free the soul here from fears⁵.

[True faith is UNIFORM.]

Third Property. True faith is uniform. As sincere obedience doth not pick and choose—take this commandment, and leave that—but hath respect to all the precepts of God; so, faith unfeigned hath respect to all the truths of God. It believes one promise as well as another. As the true Christian must not have 'the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ,' James 2:1, so, not with respect to truths. To pretend to believe one promise, and to give no credit to another, this is to be partial in the promises, as the priests are charged to be in the duties of the law, Mal. 2:9. The honour of God is as deeply engaged to perform one promise as another. Indeed, as the breach of but one commandment would put us under the guilt of the whole; so God's failing in one promise—which is blasphemy to

5. Can anyone, at this point, avoid thinking of the following verses from Hebrews? — SDB

¹⁷Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: ¹⁸that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: ¹⁹which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; ²⁰whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

— Hebrews 6

think—would be the breaking of his whole covenant. Promises are copulative as well as commands; and therefore, neither can God keep one, except he perform all; nor we believe one, except we believe all. God hath spoken all these words of promises, as he did those of precepts; his seal is to all, and he looks that we should compass all within the embraces of our faith. David bears witness to the whole truth of God, 'Thy word is true from the beginning; and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever,' Ps. 119:160. Try now thy faith here. Possibly, thou pretendest to believe the promise for pardon, and art oft pleasing thyself with the thoughts of it; but, what faith hast thou on the promise, for sanctifying thy nature and subduing thy corruptions? May be thou mindest not these, improvest not these. This fruit may hang long enough on the branches of the promises before thou gatherest it. The other is for thy tooth, not these; whereas true faith would like one as well as the other. See how David heartily prays for the performance of this promise, 'Be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name. Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me,' Ps. 119:132, 133. David would not lose any privilege that God hath by promise settled on his children. 'Do with me,' saith he, 'as thou usest to do.' This is no more than family fare—what thou promisest to do for all that love thee; and let me not go worse clad than the rest of my brethren. May be thou fanciest thou hast a faith for the eternal salvation of thy soul. But, hast thou faith to rely on God for the things of this life? A strange believer, is he not, that lives by faith for heaven, and by his wits and sinful policy for the world? Christ proves that they, John 5:44, did not believe on him, because they durst not trust him with their names and credits. If we cannot trust him with the less, how can we in the greater?

I deny not, but he that hath a true faith, yea, a strong faith for heaven, may be put to a plunge and his faith foiled about a temporal promise; but we must not from an hour of temptation, wherein God leaves his most eminent saints to humble them, judge of the constant ordinary frame of the believer's heart. Though Abraham dissembled once to save his life, which he thought in some danger for his wife's beauty; yet he did, at other times, give eminent testimony that he trusted God for his temporal life, as well as

for his eternal salvation. I do not therefore bid thee question the truth of thy faith for every fainting fit that comes over it, as to the good things of the promise of this life. A man may, in a time of war, have some of his estate lie under the enemy's power for a time, and he, so long, have no profits from it; but still he reckons it as his estate, is troubled for his present great loss, and endeavours, as soon as he can, to recover it again out of his enemy's hand. So, in the hurry of a temptation, when Satan—the soul's great enemy—is abroad, and God withdraws his assistance, the believer may have little support from some particular promise; but he ever counts that as his portion as well as any other, mourns he can act his faith no more upon it, and labours to reinforce his faith with new strength from heaven when he can, that he may be able to live upon it, and improve it more to his comfort. So that still it holds true, if we believe not God for this life, neither do we for the other. In a word, may be thou pretendest for a faith for thy temporals, and seemest to trust God for things of this life; but art a mere stranger to those prime acts of faith, whereby the believing soul closeth with Christ, and receiveth him as his Lord and Saviour, and so seals to the covenant that in the gospel is tendered to poor sinners. Canst thou so far fight against thy own reason, as to think that any temporal promise belongs to thee without these? What gives the woman the right to her jointure⁶ but her marriage covenant? And what gives the creature a true claim to these promises, or any other in the covenant of grace, but its union to Christ, and accepting of him as he is offered? The first act of God's love to the creature is that whereby he chooseth such a one to be his, and sets him apart, in his unchangeable purpose, to be an object of his special love in Christ, and therefore called 'the foundation,' as that on which God lays the superstructure of all other mercies: 'The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his,' II Tim. 2:19. First, God chooseth a person to be his, and on this foundation he builds, and bestows all

his further cost of mercy upon the creature, as one that is his. So on the creature's part, first, faith closeth with Christ, severs him in his thoughts from all others, and chooseth him to be his Saviour, in whom alone he will trust, and whom alone he will serve; which done, then it trades with this promise and that, as the portion which falls to him by marriage with Christ. And therefore see how preposterous thy course is, who snatchest these promises to thyself, before there hath passed any good-will from thee to Christ.

BRANCH THIRD.

[EXHORTATION TO UNBELIEVERS,
to obtain 'the shield of faith.']

Is faith so precious a grace? Let it provoke you, who want it, to get it. Can you hear of this pearl and not wish it were yours? Wherefore hath the Spirit spoken such great and glorious things of faith in the Word but to make it the more desirable in your eye? Is there any way to get Christ, but by getting faith? or dost not thou think that thou needest Christ as much as any other? There is a generation of men in the world would almost make one think this was their judgment, who, because their corruptions have not, by breaking out into plague-sores of profaneness, left such a brand of ignominy upon their name as some others lie under, but their conversations have been strewed with some flowers of morality, whereby their names have kept sweet among their neighbours; and, therefore, they do not at all listen to the offers of Christ, neither do their consciences check them for this neglect. And why so? Surely it is not because they are more willing to go to hell than others; but because the way they think they are in will bring them in good time to heaven, without any more ado. Poor deluded creatures! Is Christ then sent to help only some more debauched sinners to heaven, such as drunkards, swearers, and of that rank? And are civil, moral men, left to walk thither on their own legs? I am sure, if the word may be believed, we have the case resolved clear enough. That tells of but one way to heaven for all that mean to come there. As there

6. Jointure: 1. [Now Rare] an act or instance of joining; 2. Law a) an arrangement by which a husband grants real property to his wife for her use after her death. b) the property thus settled; widow's portion c) [Obs] the holding of property jointly. From Webster's — SDB

is but 'one God,' so but 'one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,' 1 Tim. 2:5. And if there is but one bridge over the gulf, judge what is like to become of the civil, righteous man, for all his sweet-scented life, if he miss this one bridge, and goes on in the road he hath set out in for heaven? O remember, proud man, who thou art, and cease thy vain attempt. Art thou not of Adam's seed? Hast thou not traitor's blood in thy veins? If 'every mouth be stopped,' Rom. 3:19, 20, how darest thou open thine? If 'all the world become guilty before God,' that 'by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified in his sight,' where then shalt thou stand to plead thy innocence before him who sees thy black skin under thy white feathers, thy foul heart through thy fair carriage? It is faith on Christ that alone can purify thy heart. Without it thy washed face and hands—external righteousness I mean—will never commend thee to God. And therefore thou art under a horrible delusion if thou dost not think that thou needest Christ and a faith to interest thee in him, as much as the bloodiest murderer or filthiest Sodomite in the world. If a company of men and children in a journey were to wade through some brook, not beyond a man's depth, the men would have the advantage of the children. But if to cross the seas, the men would need a ship to waft them over, as well as the children. And they might well pass for madmen, if they should think to wade through, without the help of a ship, that is offered them as well as the other, because they are a little taller than the rest are. Such a foolish, desperate adventure wouldst thou give for thy soul, if thou shouldst think to make thy way through the justice of God to heaven, without shipping thyself by faith in Christ, because thou art not so bad in thy external conversation as others. Let me therefore again and again beseech all that are yet destitute of faith, to endeavour for it, and that speedily. There is nothing deserves the precedency in your thoughts before this. David resolved not to 'give sleep to his eyes, or slumber to his eyelids, till he find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob,' Ps. 132:4, 5. The habitation which pleaseth God most is thy heart; but it must be a believing heart, 'That Christ may dwell in your heart by faith,' Eph. 3:17. O how dare yo sleep a night in that house where God doth not dwell? and he dwells not in thee, if thou carriest

an unbelieving heart in thy bosom. There is never a gospel sermon thou hearest, but he stands at thy door to be let in. Take heed of multiplying unkindnesses in denying him entertainment. How knowest thou but God may, finding thy heart shut so oft by unbelief against his knocks, suddenly seal thee up under final unbelief?

[DIRECTIONS TO UNBELIEVERS
for attaining faith.]

But possibly thou wilt ask now, how thou mayest get this precious grace of faith? The answer to this question, take in these following directions. **FIRST.** Labour to get thy heart convinced of, and affected with, thy unbelief. **SECOND.** Take heed of resisting or opposing his help to the Spirit of God, when he offers his help to the work. **THIRD.** Lift up thy cry aloud in prayer to God for faith. **FOURTH.** Converse much with the promises, and be frequently pondering them in thy musing thoughts. **FIFTH.** Press and urge thy soul home with that strong obligation that lies on thee, a poor humbled sinner, to believe.

[The unbeliever must get his heart
convinced of its unbelief.]

FIRST DIRECTION. Labour to get thy heart convinced of, and affected with, thy unbelief. Till this be done, thou wilt be but sluggish and slighty in thy endeavours for faith. A man may be convinced of other sins and never think of coming to Christ. Convince a drunkard of his drunkenness, and upon leaving his drunken trade his mind is pacified; yea, he blesseth himself in his reformation, because all the quarrel his conscience had with him was for that particular sin. But, when the Spirit of God convinceth the creature of his unbelief, he gets between him and those burrows in which he did use to earth and hide himself. He hath no ease in his spirit from those plasters now, which formerly had relieved him, and so kept him from coming over to Christ. Before, it served the turn to bring his conscience to sleep when it accused him for such a sin, that he had left the practice of it; and, for the neglect of a duty, that now he had taken it up without an inquiry into his state, whether good or bad, pardoned or unpardoned. Thus many make

a shift to daub and patch up the peace of their consciences, even as some do to keep up an old rotten house, by stopping in, here a tile and there a stone, till a loud wind comes and blows the whole house down. But, when once the creature hath the load of its unbelief laid upon his spirit, then it is little ease to him to think he is no drunkard as he was, no atheist in his family—without the worship of God—as he was. ‘Thy present state,’ saith the Spirit of God, ‘is as damning, in that thou art an unbeliever, as if thou wert these still.’ Yea, what thou wert, thou art; and wilt be found at the great day, to be the drunkard and atheist, for all thy seeming reformation, except by an intervening faith thou gainest a new name. What though thou beest drunk no more? yet the guilt remains upon thee till faith strikes it off with the blood of Christ. God will be paid his debt; by thee, or Christ for thee; and Christ pays no reckoning for unbelievers.

Again, as the guilt remains, so the power of those lusts remains, so long as thou art an unbeliever—however they may disappear in the outward act. Thy heart is not emptied of one sin, but the vent stopped by restraining grace. A bottle full of wine, close stopped, shows no more what it hath in it than one that is empty. And that is thy case. How is it possible thou shouldst truly mortify any one lust, that hast no faith, which is the only victory of the world? In a word, if under the convincement of thy unbelief thou wilt find—how little a sin soever now it is thought by thee—that there is more malignity in it than in all thy other sins. Hast thou been a liar? That is a grievous sin indeed. Hell gapes for every one that loveth and telleth a lie, Rev. 22:15. But know, poor wretch, the loudest lie which ever thou toldest is that which by thy unbelief thou tellest. Here thou bearest false witness against God himself, and tellest a lie, not to the Holy Ghost, as Ananias did, but a lie of the Holy Ghost; as if not a word were true he saith in the promises of the gospel. If ‘he that believeth setteth to his seal that God is true,’ judge you whether the unbeliever makes him not a liar? Hast thou been a murderer, yea, had thy hand in the blood of saints—the best of men? This is a dreadful sin, I confess. But by thy unbelief, thou art a more bloody murderer by how much the blood of God is more precious than the blood of mere men. Thou killest Christ over

again by thy unbelief, and treadest his blood under thy feet, yea, throwest it under Satan’s feet to be trampled on by him.

Question. But how can unbelief be so great a sin, when it is not in the sinner’s power to believe?

Answer. By this reason the unregenerate person might wipe off any other sin and shake off the guilt of it with but saying, ‘It is not my fault that I do not keep this commandment or that, for I have no power of myself to do them.’ This is true; he cannot perform one holy action holily and acceptably. ‘They that are in the flesh cannot please God,’ Rom. 8:8. But, it is a false inference, that therefore he doth not sin because he can do no other.

1. Because his inability is not created by God, but contracted by the creature himself. ‘God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions,’ Ecc. 7:29. Man had not his lame hand from God. No, he was made a creature fit and able for any service his Maker would please to employ him in. But man crippled himself. And man’s fault cannot prejudice God’s right. Though he hath lost his ability to obey, yet God hath not lost his power to command. Who, among ourselves, thinks his debtor discharged, by wasting that estate whereby he was able to have paid us? It is confessed, had man stood, he should not, indeed could not, have believed on Christ for salvation, as now he is held forth in the gospel; but this was not from any disability in man, but from the unmeetness of such an object to Adam’s holy state. If it had been a duty meet for God to command, there was ability in man to have obeyed.

2. Man’s present impotency to yield obedience to the commands of God, and in particular to this of believing—where it is promulgated—doth afford him no excuse; because it is not a single inability, but complicated with an inward enmity against the command. It is true man can not believe. But it is as true man will not believe. ‘Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life,’ John 5:40. It is possible, yea, ordinary, that a man may, through some feebleness and deficiency of strength, be disabled to do that which he is very willing to do; and this draws out our pity. Such a one was the poor cripple, who lay so long at ‘the pool,’ John 5:5. He was willing enough to have stepped down if he could have but crept thither; or that any other should have helped him in, if they

would have been so kind. But, what would you think of such a cripple that can neither go himself into the pool for healing, nor is willing any should help him in; but flees in the face of him that would do him this friendly office? Every unbeliever is this cripple. He is not only impotent himself, but a resister of the Holy Ghost that comes to woo and draw him unto Christ. Indeed, every one that believes believes willingly. But he is beholden, not to nature, but to grace, for this willingness. None are willing till 'the day of power' comes, Ps. 110:3, in which the Spirit of God overshadows the soul, and by his incubation, as once upon the waters, new-forms and moulds the will into a sweet compliance with the call of God in the gospel.

[The Spirit of God MUST NOT BE RESISTED
when proffering his help to the work of faith.]

SECOND DIRECTION. Take heed of resisting or opposing the Spirit of God when he offers his help to the work. If ever thou believest, he must enable thee; take heed of opposing him. Master workmen love not to be controlled. Now, two ways the Spirit of God may be opposed. First. When the creature waits not on the Spirit, where he ordinarily works faith. Second. When the creature, though he attends on him in the way and means, yet controls him in his work.

First. Take heed thou opposest not the Spirit by not attending on him in the way and means by which he ordinarily works faith. Thou knowest where Jesus used to pass, and his Spirit breathe, and that is in the great gospel ordinance—the ministry of the word. Christ's sheep ordinarily conceive when they are drinking the water of life here. The hearing of the gospel it is called, Gal. 3:2, 'The hearing of faith;' because by hearing the doctrine of faith, the Spirit works the grace of faith in them. This is the still voice he speaks to the souls of sinners in. 'Thine eyes shall see thy teachers: and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it,' Isa. 30:20. Here are God and man teaching together. Thou canst not neglect man's teaching, but thou resist the Spirit's also. It was for something that the apostle placed them so near, I Thes. 5:19, 20. He bids us 'quench not the Spirit;' and in the next words, 'Despise not prophesyings.' Surely he would have us

know that the Spirit is dangerously quenched when prophesying, or preaching of the gospel, is despised. Now the most notorious way of despising prophesying or preaching, is to is to turn our back off the ordinance and not attend on it. When God sets up the ministry of the word in a place, his Spirit then opens his school, and expects that all who would be taught for heaven should come thither. O take heed of playing the truant, and absenting thyself from the ordinance upon any unnecessary occasion, much less of casting off the ordinance. If he tempts God that would be kept from sin, and yet will not keep out of the circle of the occasion that leads to the sin; then he tempts God as much that would have faith, and pretends his desire is that the Spirit should work it, but will not come within the ordinary walk of the Spirit where he doth the work. Whether it is more fitting that the scholar should wait on his master at school to be taught, or that the master should run after the his truant scholar at play in the field to teach him there, judge you?

Second. Take heed that in thy attendance on the word thou dost not control the Spirit in those several steps he takes in thy soul in order to the production of faith. Though there are no preparatory works of our own to grace, yet the Holy Spirit hath his preparatory works whereby he disposeth souls to grace. Observe therefore carefully the gradual approaches he makes by the word to thy soul, for want of complying with him in which he may withdraw in a distaste and leave the work at a sad stand for a time, if not quite give it over, never more to return to it. We read, Acts 7:23, how 'it came into the heart of Moses to visit his brethren the children of Israel'—stirred up no doubt by God himself to the journey. There he begins to show his good-will to them, and zeal for them, in slaying an Egyptian that had wronged an Israelite; which, though no great matter towards their full deliverance out of Egypt, yet 'he supposed' (it is said, ver. 25) 'his brethren would have understood,' by that hint, 'how that God by his hand would deliver them.' But they did not comply with him, nay, rather opposed him; and therefore he withdrew, and they hear no more of Moses or their deliverance for 'forty years' space, ver. 30. Thus, may be, the Spirit of God gives thee a visit in an ordinance—directs a word that speaks to thy particular condi-

tion. He would have thee understand by this, sinner, how ready he is to help thee out of thy house of bondage—thy state of sin and wrath—if now thou wilt hearken to his counsel and kindly entertain his motions. [But], carry thyself rebelliously now against him, and God knows when thou mayest hear of him again knocking at thy door upon such an errand.

God makes short work with some in his judiciary proceedings. If he finds a repulse once, sometimes he departs, and leaves a dismal curse behind him as the punishment of it. 'I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper,' Luke 14:24. They were but once invited, and, for their first denial, this curse [is] clapped upon their heads. It is not said they shall never come where the supper stands on the board, but they shall never 'taste.' Many sit under the ordinances, where Christ in gospel-dishes is set forth admirably, but, through the efficacy of this curse upon them, never taste of these dainties all their life. They hear precious truths, but their hearts are sealed up in unbelief, and their minds made reprobate and injudicious, that they are not moved at all by them. There is a kind of frenzy and madness I have heard of, in which a man will discourse soberly and rationally, till you come to speak of some one particular subject that was the occasion of his distemper, and first broke his brain; here he is quite out, and presently loses his reason, not able to speak with any understanding of it. O how many men and women are there among us—frequent attenders on the word—who, in any matter of the world are able to discourse very understandingly and rationally; but, when you come to speak of the things of God, Christ, and heaven, it is strange to see how soon their reason is lost and all understanding gone from them! They are not able to speak of these matters with any judgment. Truly I am afraid, in many—who have sat long under the means, and the Spirit hath been making some attempts on them—this injudiciousness of mind in the things of God is but the consequence of that spiritual curse which God hath passed upon them for resisting these essays of his Spirit.

I beseech you, therefore, beware of opposing the Spirit. Doth he beam any light from his word into thy understanding, whereby thou, who wert before an ignorant sot, comest to something of the evil of sin, the

excellency of Christ, and canst discourse rationally of the truths of the Scripture? Look now to it, what thou canst with this candle of the Lord is lighted in thy mind; take heed thou beest not found sinning with it, or priding thyself in it, lest it goes out in a snuff, and thou, for 'rebelling against the light,' comest at last to 'die without knowledge,' as is threatened, Job 36:12. If the Spirit of God goes yet further, and [so] fortifies the light in thy understanding that it sets thy conscience on fire with the sense of thy sins, and apprehensions of the wrath due to them; now, take heed of resisting him when in mercy to thy soul he is kindling this fire in thy bosom, to keep thee out of a worse in hell, if thou wilt be ruled by him. Thou must expect that Satan, now his house is on fire over his head, will bestir him what he can to quench it; thy danger is lest thou shouldst listen to him for thy present ease. Take heed therefore where thou drawest thy water with which thou quenchest this fire; that it be out of no well, but out of the word of God. In thinking to quiet thy conscience, thou mayest quench the Spirit of God in thy conscience; which is the mischief the devil longs thou shouldst pull upon thy own head. There is more hope of a sick man when his disease comes out, than when it lies at the heart and nothing is seen outwardly. You know how Hazael helped his master to his sad end, who might have lived for all his disease. 'He took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died;' and it follows, 'and Hazael reigned in his stead,' II Kings 8:15. Thus the wretch came to the crown. He saw the king like to recover, and he squatted his disease, in all probability, to his heart by the wet cloth, and so by his death made a way for himself to the throne. And truly Satan will not much fear to recover the throne of thy heart—which this present combustion in thy conscience puts him in great fear of losing—can he but persuade thee to apply some carnal coolings to it, thereby to quench the Spirit in his convincing work. These convictions are sent thee mercifully in order to thy spiritual delivery, and they should be as welcome to thee as the kindly bearing pains of a woman in travail are to her. Without them she could not be delivered of her child, nor without these, more or less, can the new creature be brought forth in thy soul.

Again, may be the Spirit of God goes yet further,

and doth not only dart light into thy mind, hell-fire into thy conscience, but heaven-fire also into thy affections. My meaning is, he from the word displays Christ so in his own excellencies, and the fitness of him in all his offices to thy wants, that thy affections begin to work after him. The frequent discourses of him, and the mercy of God through him to poor sinners, are so luscious, that thou beginnest to taste some sweetness in hearing of them, which stirs up some passionate desires, whereby thou art in hearing the word often sallying forth in such-like breathings as these, ‘O that Christ were mine! Shall I ever be the happy soul whom God will pardon and save?’ Yea, possibly in the heat of thy affections thou art cursing thy lusts and Satan, who have held thee so long from Christ; and sudden purposes are taken up by thee that thou wilt bid adieu to thy former ways, and break through all the entreaties of thy dearest lusts, to come to Christ. O soul! now the kingdom of God is nigh indeed unto thee. Thou art, as I may so say, even upon thy quickening, and therefore, above all, this is the chief season of thy care, lest thou shouldst miscarry. If these sudden desires did but ripen into a deliberate choice of Christ; and these purposes settle into a permanent resolution to renounce sin and self, and so thou cast thyself on Christ; I durst be the messenger to joy thee with the birth of this babe of grace—faith I mean—in thy soul.

I confess, affections are up and down; yea, like the wind, how strongly soever they seem to blow the soul one way at present, [they] are often found in the quite contrary point very soon after. A man may be drunk with passion and affection, as really as with wine or beer. And as it is ordinary for a man to make a bargain, when he is in beer or wine, which he repents of as soon as he is sober again; so it is as ordinary for poor creatures, who make choice of Christ and his ways in a sermon—while their affections have been elevated above their ordinary pitch by some moving discourse—to repent of all they have done a while after, when the impression of the word, which heated their affection in hearing, is worn off. Then they come to themselves again and are what they were—as far from any such desires after Christ as ever. Content not therefore thyself with some sudden pangs of affection in an ordinance, but labour to preserve those impressions which then the Spirit makes

on thy soul, that they be not defaced and rubbed off—like colours newly laid on before they are dry—by the next temptation that comes. This is the caveat of the apostle, Heb. 2:1, ‘Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip’—or run out as leaking vessels. May be, at present, thy heart is melting, and in a flow with sorrow for thy sins, and thou thinkest, Surely now I shall never give my lust a kind look more—indeed one might wonder, to see the solemn mournful countenances under a sermon, which of these could be the man or woman that would afterwards be seen walking hand in hand with those sins they now weep to hear mentioned—but, as thou lovest thy life, watch thy soul, lest this prove but ‘as the early dew,’ none of which is to be seen at noon. Do thou therefore as those do who have stood some while in a hot bath, out of which when they come they do not presently go into the open air (that were enough to kill them), but betake themselves to their warm bed, that they may nourish this kindly heat; and now while their pores are open, by a gentle sweat breathe out more effectually the remaining dregs of their distemper. Thus betake thyself to thy closet, and there labour to take the advantage of thy present relenting frame for the more free pouring out of thy soul to God, now the ordinance hath thawed the tap; and, with all thy soul, beg of God he would not leave thee short of faith, and suffer thee to miscarry now he hath thee upon the wheel, but make thee a ‘vessel unto honour;’ which follows as the third direction.

[The unbeliever must
CRY IN PRAYER FOR FAITH.]

THIRD DIRECTION. Lift up thy cry aloud in prayer to God for faith.

Question. But may an unbeliever pray? Some think he ought not.

Answer. This is ill news, if it were true, even for some who do believe, but dare not say they are believers. It were enough to scare them from prayer too; and so it would be as Satan would have it—that God would have few or none to vouch him in this solemn part of his worship; for they are but the fewest of believers that can walk to the throne of grace in view

of their own faith. Prayer, it is *medium cultus*, and also *medium gratiæ*—means, whereby we give worship to God, and also wait to receive grace from God; so that to say a wicked man ought not to pray, is to say he ought not to worship God and acknowledge him to be his Maker; and also, that he ought not to wait on the means whereby he may obtain grace and receive faith. ‘Prayer is the soul’s motion God-ward,’ saith Rev. Mr. Baxter; and to say an unbeliever should not pray, is to say he should not turn to God, who yet saith to the wicked, ‘Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.’ ‘Desire is the soul of prayer,’ saith the same learned author, ‘and who dares say to the wicked, Desire not faith, desire not Christ or God?’ (*Right Method for Peace of Conscience*, p. 63)

It cannot indeed be denied, but that an unbeliever sins when he prays. But it is not his praying is his sin, but his praying unbelievably. And therefore, he sins less in praying than in neglecting to pray; because, when he prays, his sin lies in the circumstance and manner, but when he doth not pray, then he stands in a total defiance to the duty God hath commanded him to perform, and means God hath appointed him to use, for obtaining grace. I must therefore, poor soul, bid thee go on, for all these bugbears, and neglect not this grand duty which lies upon all the sons and daughters of men. Only go in the sense of thy own vileness, and take heed of carrying purposes of going on in sin with thee to the throne of grace. This were a horrible wickedness indeed. As if a traitor should put on the livery which the prince’s servants wear, for no other end but to gain more easy access to his person, that he might stab him with a dagger he hath under that cloak. Is it not enough to sin, but wouldst thou make God accessory to his own dishonour also? By this bold enterprise thou dost what lies in thee to do it. Should this be thy temper—which, God forbid—if I send thee to pray, it must be with Peter’s counsel to Simon Magus, ‘Repent of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee,’ Acts 8:22. But I suppose thee, to whom now I am directing my advice, to be of a far different complexion—one brought to some sense of thy deplored state, and so softened by the word that thou couldst be content to have Christ upon any terms; only thou art at a loss in

thy own thoughts, how such an impotent creature, yea impudent sinner, as thou hast been, should ever come to believe on him. So that it is not the love of any present sin in thy heart, but the fear of thy past sins in thy conscience, that keeps thee from believing. Now for thee it is that I would gather the best encouragements I can out of the word, and with them strew thy way to the throne of grace.

Go, poor soul, to prayer for faith. I do not fear a chiding for sending such customers to God’s door. He that sends us to call sinners home unto him, cannot be angry to hear thee call upon him. He is not so thronged with such suitors as that he can find in his heart to send them away with a denial that come with this request in their mouths. Christ complains that sinners ‘will not come unto him that they may have eternal life;’ and dost thou think he will let any complain of him, that they desire to come, and he is unwilling they should? Cheer up thy heart, poor creature, and knock boldly; thou hast a friend in God’s own bosom that will procure thy welcome. He that could, without any prayer made to him, give Christ for thee, will not be unwilling, now thou so earnestly prayest, to give faith unto thee. When thou prayest God to give, he commands thee to do. ‘And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ,’ 1 John 3:23. So that, in praying for faith, thou prayest that his will may be done by thee; yea, that part of his will which above all he desires should be done—called therefore with an emphasis ‘the work of God.’ ‘This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent,’ John 6:29. As if Christ had said, ‘If ye do not this, ye do nothing for God;’ and surely Christ knew his Father’s mind best. O how welcome must that prayer be to God which falls in with his chiefest design.

Joab found his request, in the mouth of the woman of Tekoah, to take as he would have it. How could it do otherwise, when he asks nothing but what the king liked better than himself did or could? And doth it not please God more, thinkest thou—how strong soever thy desires for faith are—that a poor humbled sinner should believe, than it can do to the creature himself? Methinks, by this time, thou shouldst begin to promise thyself, poor soul, a happy return of this thy adventure, which thou hast now sent to heaven. But for thy further encouragement

know that this grace, which thou so wantest and makest thy moan to God for, is a principal part of Christ's purchase. That blood, which is the price of pardon, is the price of faith also, by which poor sinners may come to have the benefit of that pardon. As he has bought off that wrath which man's sin had justly kindled in God's heart against him, so hath also that enmity which the heart of the creature is filled with against God, and paid for a new stock of grace, wherewith his bankrupt creature may again set up; so that, poor soul, when thou goest to pray for faith, look up unto Christ, as having a bank of grace lying by him, to give out to poor sinners who see they have nothing of their own to begin with, and in the sense of this their beggary repair to him. 'Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them,' Ps. 68:18. This is beyond all doubt meant of Christ, and to him applied, Eph. 4:8. Now observe,

First. There is a bank and treasure of gifts in the hand of Christ—'Thou hast.'

Second. Who trusts him with them; and that is his Father—'Thou hast received gifts;' that is, Christ of his Father.

Third. When, or upon what consideration, doth the Father deposit this treasure into Christ's hands? 'Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received,' &c. That is, when Christ had vanquished sin and Satan by his death and rode in the triumphant chariot of his ascension into heaven's glorious city, then did Christ receive these gifts. They were the purchase of his blood, and the payment of an old debt which God, before the foundation of the world—when the covenant was transacted and struck—promised his Son, upon the condition of his discharging sinful man's debt with the effusion of his own precious blood unto death.

Fourth. The persons for whose use Christ received these gifts—'for men,' not angels—for 'rebellious' men, not men without sin; so that, poor soul, thy sinful nature and life do not make thee an excepted person, and shut thee out from receiving any of this dole.

Fifth. Observe the nature of these gifts, and the end they are given Christ for; 'that God may dwell in them or with them.' Now, nothing but faith can make

a soul that hath been rebellious a place meet for the holy God to dwell in. This is the gift indeed he received all other gifts for, in a manner. Wherefore the gifts of the Spirit and ministry, 'apostles, teachers, pastors,' &c., but that by these he might work faith in the hearts of poor sinners? Let this give thee boldness, poor soul, humbly to press God for that which Christ hath paid for. Say, 'Lord, I have been a rebellious wretch indeed; but did Christ receive nothing for such? I have an unbelieving heart; but I hear there is faith paid for in thy covenant. Christ shed his blood that thou mightest shed forth thy Spirit on poor sinners.' Dost thou think, that while thou art thus pleading with God, and using Christ's name in prayer to move him, that Christ himself can sit within hearing of all this, and not befriend thy motion to his Father? Surely he is willing that what God is indebted to him should be paid; and therefore, when thou beggest faith upon the account of his death, thou shalt find him ready to join issue with thee in the same prayer to his Father. Indeed, he went to heaven on purpose that poor returning souls might not want a friend at court, when they come with their humble petitions thither.

[The unbeliever should, for faith,
CONVERSE MUCH WITH THE PROMISES.]

FOURTH DIRECTION. Converse much with the promises, and be frequently pondering them in thy musing thoughts. It is indeed the Spirit's work, and only his, to bottom thy soul upon the promise, and give his word a being by faith in thy heart. This thou canst not do. Yet, as fire came down from heaven upon Elijah's sacrifice, when he had laid the wood in order and gone as far as he could; so thou mayest comfortably hope that then the Spirit of God will come with spiritual light and life to quicken the promise upon thy heart, when thou hast been conscionably diligent in meditating on the promise; if withal thou ownest God in the thing as he did. For when he had laid all in order, he lift up his heart to God in prayer, expecting all from him, 1 Kings 18:36. I know no more speedy way to invite the Spirit of God into our assistance than this. As he tempts the devil to tempt him that lets his eyes gaze, or thoughts gad, upon a lustful object, so he bespeaks the Holy Spirit's company that

lets out his thoughts upon holy heavenly objects. We need not doubt but the Spirit of God is as willing to cherish any good motion, as the infernal spirit is to nourish that which is evil. We find the spouse sitting under the shadow of her beloved, as one under an apple-tree, Song 2:3, and presently she tells us 'his fruit was sweet to her taste.' What doth this her sitting under his shadow better signify, than a soul sitting under the thoughts of Christ and the precious promises, that grow out of him as branches out of a tree? Do but, O Christian, place thyself here awhile, and it were strange if the Spirit should not shake some fruit from one branch or another into thy lap. Thou knowest not but, as Isaac met his bride when he went into the fields to meditate, so thou mayest meet thy beloved while walking by thy meditations in this garden of the promises.

[The unbeliever should press his soul with the
STRONG OBLIGATION WE ARE UNDER TO BELIEVE.]

FIFTH DIRECTION. Press and urge thy soul home with that strong obligation that lies upon thee, a poor humbled sinner, to believe. Possibly, God hath [so] shamed thee in the sight of thy own conscience for other sins, that thou loatest the very thought of them, and durst as well run thy head into the fire as allow thyself in them. If thou shouldst wrong thy neighbour in his person, name, or estate, it would kindle a fire in thy conscience and make thee afraid to look within doors—converse, I mean, with thy own thoughts—till thou hadst repented of it. And is faith the only indifferent thing—a business left to thy own choice, whether thou wilt be so good to thyself as to believe or no? Truly, the tenderness of conscience which many humbled sinners express in trembling at, and smiting them for, other sins, compared with the little sense they express for this of unbelief, speaks as if they thought that they offended God in them, and only wronged themselves by this their unbelief. O how greatly thou art deceived and abused in thy own thoughts if these be thy apprehensions!—yea, if thou dost not think thou dishonourest God and offendest him in a more transcendent manner by thy unbelief than by all thy other sins!

What Bernard saith of a hard heart I may say of an unbelieving heart, *illud cor verè durum, quod non*

trepidat, ad nomen cordis duri—that is a hard heart indeed, saith he, that trembles not at the name of a hard heart. And that is an unbelieving heart indeed, that trembles not at the name of an unbelieving heart. Call thyself, O man, to the bar, and hear what thy soul hath to say for its not closing with Christ, and thou shalt then see what an unreasonable reason it will give. It must be either because thou likest not the terms, or else because thou fearest they are too good ever to be performed. Is the first of these thy reason, because thou likest not the terms on which Christ is offered? Possibly, might thou but have had Christ and thy lusts with him, thou wouldst have been better pleased. But to part with thy lusts to gain a Christ, this thou thinkest is 'a hard saying.' It is strange this should offend thee, which God could not have left out and truly loved us. Thou art a sot, a devil, if thou dost not think thy sins the worst piece of thy misery. O what is Christ worth in thy thoughts if thou darest not trust him to recompense the loss of a base lust? That man values Gold little who thinks he shall pay too dear for it by throwing the dirt or dung out of his hands, with which they are full, to receive it. Well sinner, the terms for having Christ, it seems, content thee not. Ask then thy soul how the terms on which thou holdest thy lusts like thee? Canst thou, doth thou think, better spare the blissful presence of God and Christ in hell, where thy lusts, if thou holdest of this mind, are sure enough to leave thee at last, than the company of thy lusts in heaven, whither faith in Christ would as certainly bring thee? Then take thy choice, and leave it for thy work in hell to repent of thy folly. But I should think, if thou wouldst be so faithful to thyself as to state the case right, and then seriously acquaint thy soul with it, giving it time and leisure to dwell upon it daily, that thou wouldst soon come to have better thoughts of Christ, and worse of thy sins.

But may be this is not the reason that keeps thee from believing. The terms thou likest highly, but it cannot enter into thy heart to think that ever such great things as are promised should be performed to such a one as thou art. Well, of the two, it is better the rub in thy way to Christ should lie in the difficulty that thy understanding finds to conceive, than in the obstinacy of thy will not to receive, what God in Christ offers. But this must be removed also. And

therefore fall to work with thy soul, and labour to bring it to reason in this particular, for, indeed, nothing can be more irrational than to object against the reality and certainty of God's promises. Two things well wrought on thy soul, would satisfy thy doubts and scatter thy fears as to this.

First. Labour to get a right notion of God in thy understanding, and it will not appear strange at all that a great God should do so great things for poor sinners. If a beggar should promise you a thousand pounds a year, you might indeed slight it, and ask where should he have it? But if a prince should promise more, you would listen after it, because he hath an estate that bears proportion to his promise. God is not engaged for more by promise than infinite mercy, power, and faithfulness can see discharged. 'Be still, and know that I am God,' Ps. 46:10. Of this psalm Luther would say, in times of great confusion in the church, 'Let us sing the six and fortieth psalm, in spite of the devil and all his instruments.' And this clause of it, poor humbled soul, thou mayest sing with comfort, in spite of Satan and sin also, 'Be still, O my soul, and know that he who offers thee mercy is God.' 'They that know his name will trust in him.'

Second. Peruse well the securities which this great God gives for the performance of his promise to the believer, and thou shalt find them so many and great—though his bare word deserves to be taken for more than our souls are worth—that if we had the most slippery cheating companion in the world under such bonds for the paying of a sum of money, we should think it were sure enough; and wilt thou not rest satisfied when the true and faithful God puts himself under these for thy security, whose truth is so immutable that it is more possible for light to send forth darkness, than it is that a lie should come out of his blessed lips?

BRANCH FOURTH.

[EXHORTATION TO BELIEVERS to preserve the 'shield of faith.']

I now turn myself to you that are believers in a double exhortation. FIRST. Seeing faith is such a choice grace, be stirred up to a more than ordinary

care to preserve it. SECOND. If faith be such a choice grace, and thou hast it, dent not what God hath done for thee.

[Faith is to be PRESERVED WITH EXCEEDING CARE because of its pre-eminence among graces.]

EXHORTATION FIRST. Seeing faith is such a choice grace, be stirred up to a more than ordinary care to preserve it. Keep that, and it will keep thee and all thy other graces. Thou standest by faith; if that fails thou fallest. Where shall we find thee then but under thy enemies' feet? Be sensible of any danger thy faith is in; like that Grecian captain who, being knocked down in fight, asked as soon as he came to himself where his shield was. This he was solicitous for above anything else. O be asking, in this temptation, and that duty, where is thy faith, and how it fares? This is the grace which God would have us chiefly judge and value ourselves by, because there is the least danger of priding in this self-emptying grace above any other. 'I say through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith,' Rom. 12:3. There were many gifts which the Corinthians received from God, but he would have them think of themselves rather by their faith, and the reason is, that they may 'think soberly.'

Indeed all other graces are to be tried by our faith; if they be not fruits of faith they are of no true worth. This is the difference between a Christian and an honest heathen. He values himself by his patience, temperance, liberality, and other moral virtues which he hath to show above others. These he expects will commend him to God and procure him a happiness after death; and in these he glories and makes his boast while he lives. But the Christian, he is kept sober in the sight of these—though they commence graces in him that were but virtues in the heathen—because he hath a discovery of Christ, whose righteousness and holiness by faith become his; and he values himself by these more than what is inherent in him. I cannot better illustrate this than by two men—the one a courtier, the other a countryman and a stranger to the court, both having fair estates,

but the courtier the greatest by far. Ask the country gentleman, that hath no relation to court or place in the prince's favour, what he is worth; and he will tell you as much as his lands and monies amount to. These he values himself by. But, ask the courtier what he is worth; and he—though he hath more land and money by far than the other—will tell you he values himself by the favour of his prince more than by all his other estate. I can speak a big word, saith he: 'What my prince hath is mine, except his crown and royalty; his purse mine to maintain me, his love to embrace me, his power to defend me.' The poor heathens, being strangers to God and his favour in Christ, they blessed themselves in the improvement of their natural stock, and that treasure of moral virtues which they had gathered together with their industry, and the restraint that was laid upon their corruptions by a secret hand they were not aware of. But the believer, having access by faith into this grace wherein he stands so high in court favour with God by Jesus Christ, he doth and ought to value himself chiefly by his faith rather than any other grace. Though none can show these graces in their true heavenly beauty besides himself, yet, they are not these, but Christ, who is his by faith, that he blesseth himself in. The believer, he can say through mercy, that he hath a heart beautified with those heavenly graces, to which the heathen's mock-virtue's and the proud self-justiciary's mock-graces also, are no more to be compared, than the image in the glass is to the face, or the shadow to the man himself. He can say he that hath holiness in truth, which they have but in show and semblance. And this grace of God in him he values infinitely above all the world's treasure or pleasure—he had rather be the ragged saint than the robed sinner—yea, above his natural life, which he can be willing to lose, and count himself no loser, may he thereby but secure this his spiritual life. But this is not the biggest word a believer can say. He is not only partaker of the divine nature by that principle of holiness infused to him; but he is heir to all the holiness, yea, to all the glorious perfections, that are in God himself. All that God is, hath, or doth, he hath leave to call his own. God is pleased to be called his people's God—'The God of Israel,' II Sam. 23:3. As a man's house and land bears the owner's name upon it, so God is graciously pleased to carry his people's

name upon him, that all the world may know who are they he belongs to. Naboth's field is called 'the portion of Naboth,' II Kings 11:21; so God is called 'the portion of Jacob,' Jer. 10:16. Nothing hath God kept from his people, saving his crown and glory. That, indeed, he 'will not give to another,' Isa. 42:8. If the Christian wants strength, God would have him make use of his; and that he may do boldly and confidently, the Lord calls himself his people's strength, 'the strength of Israel will not lie,' I Sam. 15:29. Is it righteousness and holiness he is scanted in? Behold, where it is brought unto his hand—Christ 'is made unto us righteousness,' I Cor. 1:30, called therefore 'the Lord our righteousness,' Jer. 33:16. Is it love and mercy they would have? All the mercy in God is at their service. 'Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee!' Ps. 31:19. Mark the phrase, 'laid up for them.' His mercy and goodness—it is intended for them. As a father that lays up such a sum of money, and writes on the bag, 'This is a portion for such a child.' But how comes the Christian to have this right to God, and all that vast and untold treasure of happiness which is in him? This indeed is greatly to be heeded. It is faith that gives him a good title unto all this. That which makes him a child makes him an heir. Now faith makes him a child of God, 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name,' John 1:12. As therefore, if you would not call your birthright into question, and bring your interest in Christ, and those glorious privileges that come along with him, under a sad dispute in your souls, look to your faith.

Question. But what counsel, may the Christian say, can you give for the preserving of my faith?

Answer. To this I answer in these following particulars. First. That which was instrumental to beget thy faith will be helpful to preserve it, viz. the word of God. Second. Wouldst thou preserve thy faith, look to thy conscience. Third. Exercise it. Fourth. Take special notice of that unbelief which yet remains in thee. Fifth. If thou wouldst preserve thy faith, labour to increase it.

[DIRECTIONS to believers
for the preserving of faith.]

First Direction. That which was instrumental to beget thy faith will be helpful to preserve it—I mean the word of God. As it was seed for the former purpose in thy conversion, so now it is milk for the present sustentation of thy faith. Lie sucking at this breast, and that often. Children cannot suck long, nor digest much at a time, and therefore need the more frequent returns of their meals. Such children are all believers in this world. ‘Precept’ must be ‘upon precept, line upon line, here a little, and there a little.’ The breast [must be] often drawn out for the nourishing of them up in their spiritual life, or else they cannot subsist. It was not ordinary that Moses should look so well as he did after he had fasted so long, Ex. 34:28, 29. And truly it is a miraculous faith they must have who will undertake to keep their faith alive without taking any spiritual repast from the word. I have heard of some children that have been taken from their mother’s breast as soon almost as born, and brought up by hand, who yet have done well for their natural life. But I shall not believe a creature can thrive in his spiritual life, who cast off ordinances, and weans himself from the word, till I hear of some other way of provision that God hath made for the ordinary maintenance of it besides this; and I despair of living so long as to see this proved. I know some, that we may hope well of, have been for a time persuaded to turn their backs on the word and ordinances; but they have turned well hunger-bit to their old fare again, yea, with Naomi’s bitter complaint in their mouths, ‘I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty,’ Ruth 1:21. And happy are them that they are come to their stomachs in this life, before this food be taken off the table, never more to be set on. He that taught Christians to pray for their daily bread, did suppose they had need of it; and surely he did not mean only or chiefly corporal bread, who, in the same chapter bids them, ‘But seek ye first the kingdom of God,’ Matt. 6:33. Well, Christian, prize thou the word, fed savourily on the word, whether it be dished forth in a sermon at the public, or in a conference with some Christian friend in private, or in a more secret duty of reading and meditation by thy solitary self. Let none of these

be disused, or carnally used, by thee, and with God’s blessing thou shalt reap the benefit of it in thy faith. When thy stomach fails to the word, thy faith must needs begin to fail on the word. O that Christians, who are so much in complaints of their weak faith, would but turn their complaints into inquiries why it is so weak and declining! Is it not because faith hath missed its wonted meals from the word? Thou, happily, formerly broken through many straits to keep thy acquaintance with God in his word, and wert well paid for that time which thou didst borrow of thy other occasions for this end, by that sweet temper that thou foundest thy heart in to trust God and rely upon him in all conditions; but now, since thou hast discontinued thy acquaintance with God in those ordinances, thou perceivest a sad change. Where thou couldst have trusted God, now thou art suspicious of him. Those promises that were able in a mutiny and hubbub of thy unruly passions, to have hushed and quieted all in thy soul at their appearing in thy thoughts, have now, alas! but little authority over thy murmuring unbelieving heart, to keep it in any tolerable order. If it be thus with thee, poor soul, thy case is sad; and I cannot give thee better counsel for thy soul, than that which physicians give men in a consumption for their bodies. They ask them where they were born and bred up, and to that their native air they send them, as the best means to recover them. Thus, soul, let me ask thee, if thou ever hadst faith, where it was born and bred up? was it not in the sweet air of ordinances, hearing, meditating, conferring of the word, and praying over the word? Go, poor creature, and get thee as fast as thou canst into thy native air, where thou didst draw thy first Christian breath, and where thy faith did so thrive and grow for a time. No means more hopeful to set thy feeble faith on its legs again than this.

Second Direction. Wouldst thou preserve thy faith, look to thy conscience. A good conscience is the bottom faith sails in. If the conscience be wrecked, how can it be thought that faith should be safe? If faith be the jewel, a good conscience is the cabinet in which it is kept; and if the cabinet be broken, the jewel must needs be in danger of losing. Now you know what sins waste the conscience—sins either deliberately committed, or impudently continued in.

O take heed of deliberate sins! Like a stone thrown into a clear stream, they will so roil thy soul and muddy it, that thou, who even now couldst see thy interest in the promise, wilt be at a loss and not know what to think of thyself. They are like the fire on the top of the house; it will be no easy matter to quench it. But, if thou hast been so unhappy as to fall into such a slough, take heed of lying in it by impenitency. The sheep may fall into a ditch, but it is the swine that wallows in it; and therefore, how hard wilt thou find it, thinkest thou, to act thy faith on the promise, when thou art, by thy filthy garments and besmeared countenance, so unlike one of God's holy one's? It is dangerous to drink poison, but far more to let it lie in the body long. Thou canst not act thy faith, though a believer, on the promise, so as to apply the pardon it presents to thy soul, till thou hast renewed thy repentance.

Third Direction. Exercise thy faith, if thou meanest to preserve it. We live by faith, and faith lives by exercise. As we say of some stirring men, they are never well but at work—confine them in their bed or chair and you kill them; so here, hinder faith from working, and you are enemies to the very life and being of it. Why do we act faith so little in prayer, but because we are no more frequent in it? Let the child seldom see its father or mother, and when he comes into their presence he will not make much after them. Why are we no more able to live on a promise when at a plunge? Surely because we live no more with the promise. The more we converse with the promise, the more confidence we shall put in it. We do not strangers as we do our neighbours, in whose company we are almost every day. It were a rare way to secure our faith, yea, to advance it and all our other graces, would we, in our daily course labour to do all our actions, as in obedience to the command, so in faith on the promise. But alas! how many enterprises are undertaken where faith is not called in, nor the promise consulted with, from one end of the business to the other? And therefore, when we would make use of faith in some particular strait, wherein we think ourselves to be more than ordinary at a loss, our faith itself is at a loss, and to seek, like a servant who, because his master very seldom employs him, makes bold to be gadding abroad, and so when his master doth call him upon some extraordinary occasion, he

is out of the way and not to be found. O Christian! take heed of letting your faith be long out of work. If you do not use it when you ought, it might fail you when you desire most to act it.

Fourth Direction. Take special notice of that unbelief which yet remain in thee and, as it is putting forth daily its head in thy Christian course, be sure thou loadest thy soul with the sense of it, and deeply humblest thyself before God for it. What thy faith loseth by every act of unbelief, it recovers again by renewing thy repentance. David's faith was on a mending hand when he could shame himself heartily for his unbelief, Ps. 73:22. He confesseth how 'foolish and ignorant' he was; yea, saith he, 'I was as a beast before thee'—so irrational and brutish his unbelieving thoughts now appeared to him—and, by this ingenuous, humble confession, the malignity of his distemper breathes out [so] that he is presently in his old temper again, and his faith is able to act as high as ever. 'Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory,' ver. 23, 24. But so long as thy unbelief is sure to grow upon thee as thou beest unhumbled for it. We have the reason why the people of Laish were so bad. 'There was no magistrate in the land, that might put them to shame in anything,' Judges 18:7. Christian, thou hast a magistrate in thy bosom commissioned by God himself to check, reprove, and shame thee, when thou sinnest. Indeed, all things go to wreck in that soul where this [one] doth his office. Hear therefore what this hath to charge thee with, that thou mayest be ashamed. There is no sin dishonours God more than unbelief; and this sword cuts his name deepest when in the hand of a saint. O to be wounded in the house of his friends, this goes near the tender heart of God. And there is reason enough why God should take this sin so unkindly at a saint's hand, if we consider the near relation such a one stands in to God. It would grieve an indulgent father to see his own child come into court, and there bear witness against him and charge him of some untruth in his words, more than if a stranger should do it; because the testimony of a child, though, when it is for the vindication of a parent it may lose some credit in the opinion of those that hear it, upon the suspicion of partiality, yet, when against a parent, it seems to carry some more probability of truth than what is

another that is a stranger says against him; because the band of natural affection with which the child is bound to his parent is so sacred that it will not be easily suspected. He can offer violence to it, but upon the more inviolable necessity of bearing witness to the truth.

O think of this, Christian, again and again—by thy unbelief thou bearest false witness against God! And if thou, a child of God, speakest no better of thy heavenly Father, and presentest him in no fairer character to the world, it will be no wonder if it be confirmed in its hard thoughts of God, even to final impenitency and unbelief, when it shall see how little credit he finds with thee, for all thy great profession of him and near relation to him. When we would sink the reputation of a man the lowest possible, we cannot think of an expression that will do it more effectually than to say, ‘He is such a one as those that are nearest to him, even his own children, dare not trust, or will not give him a good word.’ O Christian, ask thyself whether thou couldst be willing to be the unhappy instrument to defame God, and take away his good name in the world. Certainly thy heart trembles at the thought of it if a saint; and if it doth, then surely thy unbelief, by which thou hast done this so oft, will wound thee to the very heart; and, bleeding for what thou hast done, thou wilt beware of taking that sword into thy hand again, with which thou hast given so many a wound to the name of God and thy own peace.

Fifth Direction. If thou wouldst preserve thy faith, labour to increase it. None [are] in more danger of losing what they have than those poor-spirited men who are content with what they have. A spark is sooner smothered than a flame; a drop more easily drunk up and dried than a river. The stronger thy faith is, the safer thy faith is from the enemies’ assaults. The intelligence which an enemy hath of a castle’s being weakly provided for a siege, is enough to bring him against it, which else should not have been troubled with his company. The devil is a coward, and he loves to fight on the greatest advantage; and greater he cannot have than the weakness of the Christian’s faith. Didst thou but know, Christian, the many privileges of a strong faith above a weak, thou wouldst never rest till thou hadst it. Strong faith comes conqueror out of those temptations where

weak faith is foiled and taken prisoner. Those Philistines could not stand before Samson in his strength, who durst dance about him scornfully in his weakness. When David’s faith was up how undauntedly did he look death in the face! 1 Sam. 30:6. But, when that was out of heart, O how poor-spirited is he!—ready to run his head into every hole, though never so dishonourably, to save himself, 1 Sam. 21:13.

Strong faith frees the Christian from those heart-rending thoughts which weak faith must needs be oppressed with. ‘Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee,’ Isa. 26:3. So much faith, so much inward peace and quietness. If little faith, then little peace and serenity, through the storms that our unbelieving fears will necessarily gather. If strong faith, then strong peace; for so the ingemination in the Hebrew, ‘peace, peace,’ imports. It is confessed that weak faith hath as much peace with God through Christ as the other hath by his strong faith, but not so much bosom peace. Weak faith will as surely land the Christian in heaven as strong faith; for it is impossible the least dram of true grace should perish, being all incorruptible seed. But the weak doubting Christian is not like to have so pleasant a voyage thither as another with strong faith. Though all in the ship come safe to shore, yet he that is all the way sea-sick hath not so comfortable a voyage as he that is strong and healthful. There are many delightful prospects occur in a journey which he that is sick and weak loseth the pleasure of. But the strong man views all with abundance of delight; and though he wisheth with all his heart he was at home, yet the entertainment he hath from these do much shorten and sweeten his way to him. Thus, Christian, there are many previous delights which saints travelling to heaven meet on their way thither—besides what God hath for them at their journey’s end—but it is the Christian whose faith is strong and active on the promise that finds them. This is he who sees the spiritual glories in the promise that ravish his soul with unspeakable delight; while the doubting Christian’s eye of faith is so gummed up with unbelieving fears that he can see little to affect him in it. This is he that goes singing all the way with the promise in his eye; while the weak Christian, kept in continual pain with his own doubts and jealousies, goes sighing and mourning with a heavy heart, because his interest

in the promise is yet under a dispute in his own thoughts. As you would not therefore live uncomfortably, and have a dull melancholy walk of it to heaven, labour to strengthen your faith.

Question. But may be you will ask, How may I know whether my faith be strong or weak? I answer by these following characters.

[CHARACTERS by which we may know whether faith be strong or weak.]

1. Character. The more entirely the Christian can rely on God, upon his naked word in the promise, the stronger his faith is. He, surely, putteth greater confidence in a man that will take his own word or single bond for a sum of money, than he who dares not, except some others will be bound for him. When we trust God for his bare promise, we trust him on his own credit, and this is faith indeed. He that walks without staff or crutch is stronger than he that needs these to lean on. Sense and reason, these are the crutches which weak faith leans on too much in its acting. Now, soul, inquire,

(1.) Canst thou bear up thyself on the promise, though the crutch of sense and present feeling be not at hand? May be thou hast had some discoveries of God's love and beamings forth of his favour upon thee; and so long as the sun shined thus in at thy window thy heart was lightsome, and thou thoughtest thou shouldst never distrust God more, or listen to thy unbelieving thoughts more; but how findest thou thy heart now, since those sensible demonstrations are withdrawn, and maybe some frowning providence sent in the room of them? Dost thou presently dispute the promise in thy thoughts, as not knowing whether thou mayest venture to cast anchor on it or no? Because thou hast lost the sense of his love, does thy eye of faith fail thee also, that thou hast lost the sight of his mercy and truth in the promise? Surely thy eye of faith is weak, or else it would read the promise without these spectacles. The little child, indeed, thinks the mother is quite lost if she goes but out of the room where he is; but as it grows older so it will be wiser. And truly so will the believer also. Christian, bless God for the experiences and sensible tastes thou hast at any time of his love; but know, that we cannot judge of our faith, whether weak or strong,

by them. Experiences, saith Parisiensis, are like crutches, which do indeed help a lame man to go, but they do not make the lame man sound or strong; food and physic must do that. And therefore, Christian, labour to lean more on the promise, and less on sensible expressions of God's love, whether it be in the present feeling or past experiences of it. I would not take you off from improving these, but [from] leaning on these, and limiting the actings of our faith to these. A strong man, though he doth not lean on his staff all the way he goes—as the lame man doth on his crutch, which bears his whole weight—yet he may make good use of it now and then to defend himself when set upon by a thief or dog in his way. Thus the strong Christian may make good use of his experiences in some temptations, though he doth not lay the weight of his faith upon them, but [upon] the promise.

(2.) Canst thou bear thyself upon the promise, when the other crutch of reason breaks under thee? or does thy faith ever fall to the ground with it? That is a strong faith indeed that can trample upon the improbabilities and impossibilities which reason would be objecting against the performance of the promise, and give credit to the truth of it with a non obstante—notwithstanding. Thus Noah fell hard to work about the ark, upon the credit he gave both the threatening and promissory part of God's word, and never troubled his head to clear the matter to his reason how these strange things could come to pass. And it is imputed to the strength of Abraham's faith, that he could not suffer his own narrow reason to have the hearing of the business, when God promised him a Michaelmas⁷ spring—as I may say—a son in his old age. 'And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead,' Rom. 4:19. Skilful swimmers are not afraid to go above their depth, whereas young learners feel for the ground, and are loath to go far from the bank-side. Strong faith fears not when God carries the creature beyond the depth of his reason: 'We know not what to do,' said good Jehoshaphat, 'but our eyes are upon thee,' II Chr. 20.

7. Michaelmas: the feast of the archangel Michael, celebrated chiefly in England, on September 29: also Michaelmas Day. — from Webster's. SDB

As if he had said, 'We are in a sea of troubles; beyond our own help, or any thought how we can wind out of these straits; but our eyes are upon thee. We dare not give our case for desperate so long as there is strength in thine arm, tenderness in thy bowels, and truth in thy promise.' Whereas weak faith, that is groping for some footing for reason to stand on, it is taken up how to reconcile the promise and the creature's understanding. Hence those many questions which drop from its mouth. When Christ said, 'Give ye them to eat,' Mark 6, his disciples ask him, 'Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread?' As if Christ's bare word could not spare that cost and trouble! 'Whereby shall I know this?' saith Zacharias to the angel, 'for I am an old man,' Luke 1:18. Alas! his faith was not strong enough to digest, at present, this strange news.

2. Character. The more composed and contented the heart is under the changes which providence brings upon the Christian's state and condition in the world, the stronger his faith is. Weak bodies cannot bear the change of weather so well as healthful and strong ones do. Hot and cold, fair or foul, cause no great alteration in the strong man's temper; but alas! the other is laid up by them, or at best goes complaining of them. Thus strong faith can live in any climate, travel in all weather, and fadge with any condition. 'I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content,' Php. 4:11. Alas! all Christ's scholars are not of Paul's form; weak faith hath not yet got the mastery of this hard lesson. When God turns thy health into sickness, thy abundance into penury, thy honour into scorn and contempt, into what language dost thou now make thy condition known to him? Is thy spirit embittered into discontent, which thou ventest in murmuring complaints? or art thou well satisfied with God's dealings, so as to acquiesce cheerfully in thy present portion, not from an unsensibleness of the affliction, but approbation of divine appointment? If the latter, thy faith is strong.

(1.) It shows God hath a throne in thy heart. Thou reverencest his authority and ownest his sovereignty, or else thou wouldst not acquiesce in his orders. 'I was dumb, because thou didst it,' Ps. 39:9. If the blow had come from any other hand he could not have taken it so silently. When the servant strike the child, he runs to his father and makes his complaint;

but, though the father doth more to him, he complains not of his father, nor seeks redress from any other, because it is his father whose authority he reveres. Thus thou comportest thyself toward God; and what but a strong faith can enable thee? 'Be still, and know that I am God,' Ps. 46:10. We must know God believingly to be what he is, before our hearts will be 'still.'

(2.) This acquiescency of spirit under the disposition of providence shows that thou dost not only stand in awe of his sovereignty, but hast amiable comfortable thoughts of his mercy and goodness in Christ. Thou believest he can soon, and will certainly make thee amends, or else thou couldst not so easily part with these enjoyments. The child goes willingly to bed when others, may be, are going to supper at a great feast in the family; but the mother promiseth the child to save something for him against the morning; this the child believes and is content. Surely thou hast something in the eye of thy faith which will recompense all thy present loss; and this makes thee fast so willingly when others feast, be sick when others are well. Paul tells us why he and his brethren in affliction did not faint, II Cor. 4:16, 17. They saw heaven coming to them while earth was going from them. 'For which cause we faint not, ...for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'

3. Character. The more able to wait long for answers to our desires and prayers, the stronger faith is. It shows the tradesman to be poor and needy when he must have ready money for what he sells. They that are forehanded are willing to give time, and able to forbear long. Weak faith is all for the present; if it hath not presently its desires answered, then it grows jealous and lays down sad conclusions against itself—his prayer was not heard, or he is not one God loves, and the like. Much ado to be kept out of a fainting fit—'I said in my haste that all men were liars.' But strong faith that can trade with God for time, yea, waits God's leisure—'He that believeth shall not make haste,' Isa. 28:16. He knows his money is in a good hand, and he is not over-quick to call for it home, knowing well that the longest voyages have the richest returns. As rich lusty ground can forbear rain longer than lean or sandy [ground], which must have a shower ever and anon, or the corn on it fades;

or as a strong healthful man can fast longer without faintness, than the sickly and weak,—so the Christian of strong faith can stay longer for spiritual refreshing from the presence of the Lord, in the returns of his mercy and discoveries of his love to him, than one of weak faith.

4. Character. The more the Christian can lose or suffer upon the credit of the promise, the stronger his faith is. If you should see a man part with a fair inheritance, and leave his kindred and country where he might pass his days in the embracements of his dear friends and the delicious fare which a plentiful estate would afford him every day, to follow a friend to the other end of the world, with hunger and hardship, through sea and land, and a thousand perils that meet him on every hand, you would say that this man had a strong confidence of his friend, and a dear love to him, would you not? Nay, if he should do all this for a friend whom he never saw, upon the bare credit of a letter which he sends to invite him to come over to him, with a promise of great things he will do for him; now, to throw all his present possessions and enjoyments at his heels, and willingly put himself into the condition of a poor pilgrim and traveller, with the loss of all he hath, that he may come to his dear friend, this adds to the wonder of his confidence. Such gallant spirits we read of—‘Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice,’ I Peter 1:6-8. Observe the place, and you shall find them in sorrowful plight—‘in heaviness through manifold temptations’—yet, because their way lies through the sloughs to the enjoyment of God and Christ, whom they never saw or knew, but by the report the word makes of them, they can turn their back off the world’s friendship and enjoyments—with which it courted them as well as others—and go with a merry heart through the deepest of them all. Here is glorious faith indeed. It is not praising of heaven, and wishing we were there, but a cheerful abandoning the dearest pleasures, and embracing the greatest sufferings of the world when called to the same, that will evidence our faith to be both true and strong.

5. Character. The more easily that the Christian can repel motions, and resist temptations to sin, the stronger is his faith. The snare or net which holds the little fish fast, the greater and stronger fish easily

breaks through. The Christian’s faith is strong or weak as he finds it easy or hard to break from temptations to sin. When an ordinary temptation holds thee by the heel, and thou art entangled in like the fly in the spider’s web—much ado to get off, and persuade thy heart from yielding—truly it speaks faith very feeble. To have no strength to oppose the assaults of sin and lust, speaks the heart void of faith. Where faith hath not a hand to prostrate an enemy, it yet hath a hand to lift up against it, and a voice to cry out for help to heaven. Some way or other faith will show its dislike and enter its protest against sin.

And to have little strength to resist, evidenceth a weak faith. Peter’s faith was weak when a maid’s voice dashed him out of countenance; but it was well amended when he could withstand, and, with a noble constancy, disdain the threats of a whole counsel, Acts 4. Christian, compare thyself with thyself, and give righteous judgment on thyself. Do now thy lusts as powerfully inveigle thy heart, and carry it away from God, as they did some months or years ago; or canst thou in truth say thy heart is got above them. Since thou hast known more of Christ, and had a view of his spiritual glories, canst thou now pass by their door and not look in; yea, when they knock at thy door in a temptation, thou canst shut it upon them, and disdain the motion? Surely thou mayest know thy faith is grown stronger. When we see that the clothes which a year or two ago were even fit for the person, will not now come on him, they are so little, we may easily be persuaded to believe the person is much grown since that time. If thy faith were no more grown, those temptations which fitted thee would like thee as well now. Find but the power of sin die, and thou mayest know that faith is more lively and vigorous. The harder the blow, the stronger the arm that gives it. A child cannot strike such a blow as a man. Weak faith cannot give such a home-blow to sin as a strong faith can.

6. Character. The more ingenuity and love is in thy obedient walking, the stronger thy faith is. Faith works by love, and therefore its strength or weakness may be discovered by the strength or weakness of that love it puts forth in the Christian’s actings. The strength of a man’s arm that draws a bow, is seen by the force the arrow which he shoots flies with. And certainly the strength of our faith may be

known by the force our love mounts to God with. It is impossible that weak faith—which is unable to draw the promise as a strong faith can—should leave such a forcible impression on the heart to love God to abandon sin, perform duty, and exert acts of obedience to his command, know thy place, and take it with humble thankfulness, thou art a graduate in the art of believing. The Christian's love advanceth by equal paces with his faith, as the heat of the day increaseth with the climbing sun; the higher that mounts towards its meridian, the hotter the day grows. So the higher faith lifts Christ up in the Christian, the more intense his love to Christ grows, which now sets him on work after another sort than he was wont. Before, when he was to mourn for his sins, he was acted by a slavish fear, and made an ugly face at the work, as one doth that drinks some displeasing potion; but now acts of repentance are not distasteful and formidable, since faith hath discovered mercy to sit on the brow of justice, and undeceived the creature of those false and cruel thoughts of God which ignorantly he had taken up concerning him. He doth not now 'hate the word repentance'—as Luther said he once did before he understood that place, Rom. 1:17—but goes about the work with amiable sweet apprehensions of a good God, that stands ready with the sponge of his mercy dipped in Christ's mercy, to blot out his sins as fast as he scores them up by his humble sorrowful confession of them. And the same might be said concerning all other offices of Christian piety. Strong faith makes the soul ingenuous. It doth not pay the performance of any duty, as an oppressed subject doth a heavy tax—with a deep sigh, to think how much he parts with—but as freely as a child would present his father with an apple of that orchard which he holds by gift from him. Indeed, the child when young is much servile and selfish, forbearing what his father forbids for fear of the rod, and doing what he commands for some fine thing or other that his father bribes him with, more than for pure love to his person or obedience to his will and pleasure. But, as he grows up and comes to understand himself better, and the relation he stands in, with the many obligations of it to filial obedience, then his servility and selfishness wear off, and his *σπόγγή*—natural affection—will prevail more with him to please his father than any other argument whatever. And so will

it with the Christian where faith is of any growth and ripeness.

7. Character. To name no more, the more able faith is to sweeten the thoughts of death, and make it desirable to the Christian, the stronger his faith. Things that are very sharp or sour will take much sugar to make them sweet. Death is one of those things which hath the most ungrateful taste to the creature's palate that can be. O it requires a strong faith to make the serious thoughts of it sweet and desirable! I know some in a pet and a passion have professed great desires of dying, but it hath been as a sick man desires to change his place, merely out of a weariness of, and discontent with, his present condition, without any due consideration of what they desire. But a soul that knows the consequences of death, and the unchangeableness of that state, whether of bliss or misery, that it certainly marries us to, will never cheerfully call for death in his cordial desires, till he be in some measure resolved from the promise what entertainment he may expect from God when he comes into that other world—and that weak faith will not do without abundance of fears and doubts. I confess, that sometimes a Christian of very weak faith may meet death with as little fear upon his spirit, yea, more joy, than one of a far stronger faith, when he is held up by the chin by some extraordinary comfort poured into his soul from God immediately. Should God withdraw this, however, his fears would return upon him, and he feel again his faintings; as a sick man, that hath been strangely cheered with a strong cordial, does his feebleness when the efficacy of it is spent. But we speak of the ordinary way how Christians come to have their hearts raised above the fear, yea, into a strong desire, of death, and that is by attaining to a strong faith. God can indeed make a feast of a few loaves, and multiply the weak Christian's little faith on a sudden, as he lives on a sick-bed, into a spread table of all varieties of consolations. But I fear that God will not do this miracle for that man or woman who, upon the expectation of this, contents himself with the little provision of faith he hath, and labours not to increase his store against that spending time.

[Faith or the graces of God in a believer MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED.]

EXHORTATION SECOND. We come to the second word of exhortation we have to speak to the saints:—If faith be such a choice grace, and thou hast it, deny not what God hath done for thee. Which is worst, thinkest thou?—the sinner to hide his sin and deny it, or the Christian to hide and deny his faith? I confess the first does worst, if we look to the intention of the persons; for the sinner hides his sin out of a wicked end. The doubting soul [however] means well:—he is afraid to play the hypocrite and be found a liar in saying he hath what he fears he hath not. But, if we consider the consequence of the Christian's disowning the grace of God in him, and what use the devil makes of it for the leading him into many other sins, it will not be so easy to resolve whose sin is the greatest. Good Joseph meant piously when he had thought of putting away secretly his espoused Mary—thinking no other but that she had played the whore—and yet, it would have been a sad act if he had persisted in his thoughts, especially after the angel had told him that which was conceived in her to be of the Holy Ghost. Thus thou, poor mourning soul, may be, art oft thinking to put away thy faith as some by-blow of Satan, and base-born counterfeit grace begot on thy hypocritical heart by the father of lies. Well, take heed what thou dost. Hast thou had no vision—not extraordinary of an angel or immediate revelation, but ordinary of the Spirit of God—I mean in his word and ordinances, encouraging thee from those characters which are in the Scripture given of faith, and the conformity thy faith hath to them, to take and own thy faith as that which is conceived in thee by the Holy Ghost, and not a brat formed by the delusion of Satan in the womb of thy own groundless imagination? If so, be afraid of bearing false-witness against the grace of God in thee. As there is that makes himself rich in faith that hath nothing of this grace, so there is that maketh himself poor that hath great store of this riches. Let us therefore hear what are the grounds of this thy suspicion, that we may see whether thy fears or thy faith be imaginary and false. First. Saith the poor soul, I am afraid I have no true faith because I have not those joys and consolations which others have who believe. Second. O but can

there be any true faith where there is so much doubting as I find in myself? Third. O but I fear mine is a presumptuous faith, and if so, to be sure it cannot be right.

[GROUNDS OF SUSPICION which lead to a believer's denying his faith.]

First Ground of Suspicion. I am afraid, saith the poor soul, I have no true faith, because I have not those joys and consolations which others have who believe.

Answer First. Thou mayest have inward peace though not joy. The day may be still and calm though not glorious and sunshine. Though the Comforter be not come with his ravishing consolations, yet he may have hushed the storm of thy troubled spirit; and true peace, as well as joy, is the consequent of 'faith unfeigned.'

Answer Second. Suppose thou hast not yet attained so much as to this inward peace, yet know, thou hast no reason to question the truth of thy faith for want of this. We have peace with God as soon as we believe, but not always with ourselves. The pardon may be past the prince's hand and seal, and yet not put into the prisoner's hand. Thou thinkest them too rash, dost thou not, who judged Paul a murderer by the viper that fastened on his hand? And what art thou who condemnest thyself for an unbeliever, because of those troubles and inward agonies which may fasten for a time on the spirit of the most gracious child God hath on earth?

Second Ground of Suspicion. O but can there be any true faith where there is so much doubting as I find in myself?

Answer. There is a doubting which the Scripture opposeth to the least degree of faith. Our blessed Saviour tells them what wonder they shall do if they believe and 'doubt not,' Matt. 21:21; and, Luke 17:6, he tells his disciples if they have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, they shall do as much. That which is a faith without doubting in Matthew is faith as a grain of mustard-seed in Luke. But again, there is a doubting which the Scripture opposeth not to the truth of faith, but to the strength of faith, 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?' Matt. 14:31. They are the words of Christ to sinking Peter, in which he

so chides his doubting as yet to acknowledge the truth of his faith, though weak. All doubting is evil in its nature, yet some doubting, though evil in itself, doth evidence some grace that is good to be in the person so doubting; as smoke proves some fire. And peevishness and pettishness in a sick person that before lay senseless, is a good sign of some mending, though itself a thing bad enough. But the thing here desirable, I conceive, would be to give some help to the doubting soul, that he may what his doubting is symptomatic of; whether of true faith, though weak, or of no faith. Now for this I shall lay down FOUR CHARACTERS of those doubtings which accompany true faith.

1. Character. The doubtings of a true believer are attended with much shame and sorrow of spirit, even for those doubtings. I appeal to thy conscience, poor doubting soul, whether the consideration of this one sin doth not cost thee many a salt tear and heavy sigh which others know not of? Now, I pray, from whence come these? Will unbelief mourn for unbelief? or sin put itself to shame? No, sure, it shows there is a principle of faith in the soul that takes God's part, and cannot see his promises and name wronged by unbelief without protesting against it, and mourning under it, though the hands of this grace be too weak at present to drive the enemy out of the soul. The law cleared the damsel that 'cried' out 'in the field,' and so will the gospel thee who sincerely mournest for thy unbelief, *Deut. 22:27*. That holy man, whoever he was, was far gone in his doubting disease, *Ps. 77*. How many times do we find his unbelief putting the mercy and faithfulness of God—which should be beyond all dispute in our hearts—to the question and dubious vote in his distempered soul? He might with as much reason have asked his soul whether there was a God? as whether his mercy was clean gone and his promise failed? yet so far did his fears in this hurry carry him aside. But at last you have him acknowledging his folly, *ver. 10*, 'And I said this in my infirmity.' This I may thank thee for, O my unbelief! thou enemy of God and my soul, thou wilt be puzzling me with needless fears, and make me think and speak so unworthily of my God. This proved there was faith at the bottom of his unbelief.

2. Character. The doubtings of a sincere believer are accompanied with ardent desires those things

which it most calls in question and doubts of. The weak believer, he questions whether God loves him or no, but he desires it more than life. And this is the language of a gracious soul, 'Thy lovingkindness is better than life,' *Ps. 63:3*. He doubts whether Christ be his; yet, if you should ask him what value he sets upon Christ, and what he would give for Christ, he can tell you, and that truly, that no price should be too great if he were to be bought. No condition that God offers Christ upon appears to him hard, but all easy and cheap. And this is the judgment which only the believing soul can have of Christ. 'Unto you therefore which believe, he is precious,' *I Peter 2:7*. In a word, he doubts whether he be truly holy or only counterfeit; but his soul pants and thirsts after those graces most which he can see least. He to him should be the more welcome messenger that brings him the news of a broken heart, than another that tells him of a whole crown and kingdom fallen to him. He disputes every duty and action he doth, whether it be according to the rule of the word; and yet he passionately desires that he could walk without one wry step from it; and doth not quarrel with the word because it is so strict, but with his heart because it is so loose. And how great a testimony these give of a gracious frame of heart! See *Ps. 119:20, 140*, where David brings these as the evidence of his grace. Canst thou therefore, poor soul, let out thy heart strongly after Christ and his graces, while thou dost not see thy interest in either? Be of good cheer, thou art not so great a stranger with these as thou thinkest thyself. These strong desires are the consequent of some taste thou hast had of them already; and these doubts may proceed, not from an absolute want, as if thou wert wholly destitute of them, but [from] the violence of thy desires, which are not satisfied with what thou hast. It is very ordinary for excessive love to beget excessive fear, and that groundless. The wife, because she loves her husband dearly, fears when he is abroad she shall never see him more. One while she thinks he is sick; another while killed; and thus her love torments her without any just cause, when her husband is all the while well and on his way home. A jewel of great price, or ring that we highly value, if but laid out of sight, our extreme estimate we set on them makes us presently think them lost. It is the nature of passions in this our imperfect state, when strong

and violent, to disturb our reason, and hide things from our eye which else were easy to be seen. Thus many poor doubting souls are looking and hunting to find that faith which they have already in their bosoms—[it] being hid from them merely by the vehemency of their desire of it, and [by the] fear they should be cheated with a false one for a true. As the damsel ‘opened not the gate for gladness’ to Peter Acts 12:14—her joy at [the time then] present made her forget what she did—so the high value the poor doubting Christian sets on faith, together with an excess of longing after it, suffer him not to entertain so high an opinion of himself as to think he at present hath that jewel in his bosom which he so infinitely prizeth.

3. Character. The doubtings of a truly believing soul make him more inquisitive how he may get what he sometimes he fears he hath not. Many sad thoughts pass to and fro in his soul whether Christ be his or no, whether he may lay claim to the promise or no; and these cause such a commotion in his spirit, that he cannot rest till he come to some resolution in his own thoughts from the word concerning this great case. Therefore, as Ahasuerus, when he could not sleep, called for the records and chronicles of his kingdom, so the doubting the doubting soul betakes himself to the records of heaven—the word of God in the Scripture—and one while he is reading there, another while looking into his own heart, if he can find anything that answers the characters of Scripture—faith, as the face in the glass doth the face of man. David, Ps. 77, when he was at a loss what to think of himself, and many doubts did clog his faith—inso-much that the thinking of God increased his trouble—did not sit down and let the ship drive, as we say, not regarding whether God loved him or no. No; he ‘communes with his own heart, and his spirit makes diligent search.’ Thus it is with every sincere soul under doubtings. He dares no more sit down contented in that unresolved condition, than one who thinks he smells fire in his house dares settle himself to sleep till he hath looked into every room and corner, and satisfied himself that all is safe, lest he should be waked with the fire about his ears in the night. The poor doubting soul [is indeed] much more afraid, lest it should awake with hell-fire about it; whereas a soul in a state and under the power of

unbelief, is secure and careless. The old world did not believe the threatening of the flood, and they spend no thoughts about the matter. It is at their doors and windows before they had used any means how to escape it.

4. Character. In the midst of the true believer’s doubtings there is an innitency⁸ of his heart on Christ, and a secret purpose still to cleave to him. At the same time that Peter’s feet were sinking into the waters, he was lifting up a prayer to Christ; and this proved the truth of his faith, as the other its weakness. So Jonah, he had many fears, and sometimes so predominant, that as bad humours settle into a sore, so they gathered into a hasty unbelieving conclusion, yet then his faith had some little secret hold on God. ‘Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple,’ Jonah 2:4. And, ‘When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord,’ ver. 7. Holy David also, though he could not rid his soul of all those fears which got into it through his weak faith, as water into a leaking ship, yet he hath his hand at the pump, and takes up a firm resolution against them. ‘What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee,’ Ps. 56:3. The doubting Christian sinks, but, as a traveller in a slough where the bottom is firm, and so recovers himself. But the unbeliever, he sinks in his fears, as a man in a quick-sand, lower and lower till he be swallowed up into despair. The weak Christian’s doubting is like the wavering of a ship at anchor—he is moved, yet not removed from his hold on Christ; but the unbeliever’s, like the wavering of a wave, which, having nothing to stay it, is wholly at the mercy of the wind. ‘Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed,’ James 1:6.

Third Ground of Suspicion. O but, saith another, I fear mine is a presumptuous faith, and if so, to be sure it cannot be right.

Answer. For the fuller assoiling [i.e. clearing] this objection, I shall lay down three characters of a presumptuous faith.

1. Character. A presumptuous faith is an easy faith. It hath no enemy of Satan or our own corrupt

8. Innitency: A leaning; pressure; weight. From Webster’s — SDB

hearts to oppose it, and so, like a stinking weed, shoots up and grows rank on a sudden. The devil never hath the sinner surer than when dreaming in this fool's paradise, and walking in his sleep, amidst his vain fantastical hopes of Christ and salvation. And therefore he is so far from waking him, that he draws the curtains close about him, that no light nor noise in his conscience may break his rest. Did you ever know the thief call up him in the night whom he meant to rob and kill? No, sleep is his advantage. But true faith he is a sworn enemy against. He persecutes it in the very cradle, as Herod did Christ in the cratch;⁹ he pours a flood of wrath after it as soon as it betrays its own birth by crying and lamenting after the Lord. If thy faith be legitimate Naphtali may be its name; and thou mayest say, 'With great wrestlings have I wrestled with Satan and my own base heart, and at last have prevailed.' You know the answer that Rebecca had when she inquired of God about the scuffle and striving of the children in her womb, 'Two nations,' God told her, 'were in her womb.' If thou canst find the like strife in thy soul, thou mayest comfort thyself that it is from two contrary principles, faith and unbelief, which are lusting one against another; and thy unbelief, which is the elder—however now it strives for the mastery—shall serve the younger.

2. Character. Presumptuous faith is lame of one hand; it hath a hand to receive pardon and heaven from God, but no hand to give up itself to God. True faith hath the use of both her hands. 'My beloved is mine'—there the soul takes Christ; 'and I am his'—there she surrenders herself to the use and service of Christ. Now, didst thou ever pass over thyself freely to Christ? I know none but will profess they do this. But the presumptuous soul, like Ananias, lies to the Holy Ghost, by keeping back part, yea, the chief part, of that he promised to lay at Christ's feet. This lust he sends out of the way, when he should deliver it up to justice; and that creature enjoyment he twines about, and cannot persuade his heart to trust God with the disposure of it, but cries out when the Lord calls for it, 'Benjamin shall not go.' Life is bound up in it, and if God will have it from him he must take it

by force, for there is no hope of gaining his consent. Is this the true picture of thy faith, and [of the] temper of thy soul? then verily thou blestest thyself in an idol, and mistake a bold face for a believing heart. But, if thou beest as willing to be faithful to Christ, as to pitch thy faith on Christ; if thou countest it as great a privilege that Christ should have a throne in thy heart and love, as that thou shouldst have a place and room in his mercy; in a word, if thou beest plain-hearted and wouldst not hide a sin, nor lock up a creature enjoyment, from him, but desirest freely to give up thy dearest lust to the gibbet, and thy sweetest enjoyments to stay with, or go from thee, as thy God thinks fit to allow thee—though all this be with much regret and discontent from a malignant party of the flesh within thee—thou provest thyself a sound believer; and the devil may as well say that himself believeth as that thou presumest. If this be to presume, be thou yet more presumptuous. Let the devil nickname thee and thy faith as he pleaseth; the rose-water is not the less sweet because one writes 'wormwood water' on the glass. The Lord knows who are his, and will own them for his true children, and their graces for the sweet fruits of his Spirit, though a false title be set on them by Satan and the world, yea, sometimes by believers on themselves. The father will not deny his child because he is a violent fit of a fever talks idle and denies him to be his father.

3. Character. The presumptuous faith is a sapless and unsavoury faith. When an unsound heart pretends to greatest faith on Christ, even then it finds little savour, tastes little sweetness in Christ. No, he hath his old tooth in his head, which makes him relish still the gross food of sensual enjoyments above Christ and his spiritual dainties. Would he but freely speak what he thinks, he must confess that if he were put to his choice whether he would sit with Christ and his children, to be entertained with the pleasures that they enjoy from spiritual communion with him in his promises, ordinances, and holy ways; or had rather sit with the servants, and have the scraps which God allows the men of the world in their full bags and bellies of carnal treasure; that he would prefer the latter before the former. He brags of his interest in God, but he care not how little he is in the presence of God in any duty or ordinance. Certainly, if he were such a favourite as he speaks, he would be more

9. Cratch, i.e. manger or crib.

at court than he is. He hopes to be saved, he saith, but he draws not his wine of joy at this tap. It is not the thoughts of heaven that comfort him; but what he hath in the world and of the world, these maintain his joy. When the world's vessel is out, and the creature joy spent, alas, the poor wretch can find little relief from, or relish in, his pretended hopes of heaven and interest in Christ, but he is still whining after the other. Whereas true faith alters the very creature's palate. No feast so sweet to the believer as Christ is.

Let God take all other dishes off the board and leave but Christ, he counts his feast is not gone—he hath what he likes; but let all else stand, health, estate, friends, and what else the world sets a high value on, if Christ be withdrawn he soon misseth his dish, and makes his moan, and saith, 'Alas! who hath taken away my Lord?' It is Christ that seasons these and all his enjoyments, and makes them savoury meat to his palate; but without him they have no more taste than the white of an egg without salt.

