

DIRECTION SECOND.

The nature of the War, and character of the Assailants.

‘For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places’ (Eph. 6:12).

The Words are coupled to the precedent with the casual particle ‘for,’ which either refers to the two foregoing verses—and then they are a further reason, pressing the necessity of Christian fortitude in the tenth verse, and furniture in the eleventh—or else to the last words in the eleventh verse, where the apostle having descried the saints’ grand enemy to be Satan, and described him in one of his attributes—his wily subtlety—he in this further displays him in his proper colours, not to weaken the saints’ hands, but to waken their care, that seeing their enemy marching up in a full body, they might stand in better order to receive his charge. Here, by the way, we may observe the apostle’s simplicity and plain-dealing; he doth not undervalue the strength of the enemy, and represent him inconsiderable, as captains use to keep their soldiers together, by slighting the power of their adversary; no, he tells them the worst at first. If Satan had been granted to set out his own power he could have challenged no more than is here granted to him. See here, the difference between Christ dealing with his followers, and Satan with his. Satan dares not let sinners know who that God is they fight against; this were enough to breed a mutiny in the devil’s camp. Silly souls, they are drawn into the field by a false report of God and his ways, and are kept there together, with lies and fair tales; but Christ is not afraid to show his saints their enemy in all his power and principality, the weakness of God being stronger than the powers of hell.

The words contain a lively description of a bloody and lasting war between the Christian and his implacable enemy. In them we may observe: **FIRST**, The Christian’s state in this life [is] set out by this word ‘wrestling.’ **SECOND**, The assailants that appear in arms against the Christian. They are described—**FIRST, NEGATIVELY**, ‘not flesh and blood;’ or rather comparatively, not chiefly flesh and blood. **SECOND, POSITIVELY**, ‘but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.’

DIRECTION II.—FIRST GENERAL PART.

[THE NATURE OF THE WAR IS SET OUT BY THIS WORD WRESTLING.]

‘For we wrestle,’ Eph. 6:12.

The Christian’s state in this life [is] set out by this word wrestling. The wrestling or conflicting state of a Christian in this life is rendered observable here by a threefold circumstance. **FIRST**, The sharpness of the combat. **SECOND**, The universality of the combat. **THIRD**, the permanency of the combat.

FIRST. The sharpness of the combat. The kind of combat which the Christian's state is here set out by, is the phrase translated ‘we wrestle’¹, which though it be used sometimes for a wrestling of sport and recreation, yet [is used] here to set out the sharpness of the Christian’s encounter. There are two things in wrestling that render it a sharper combat than others.

First. It is a single combat. Wrestling is not properly fighting against a multitude, but when one enemy singles out another, and enters the list with him, each exerting their whole force and strength against one another; as David and Goliath, when the whole armies stood as it were in a ring to behold the bloody issue of that duel. Now this is more fierce than to fight in an army, where though the battle be sharp and long, the soldier is not always engaged, but falls off when he has discharged, and takes breath a while; yea, possibly may escape without hurt or stroke, because there the enemy’s aim is not at this or that man, but at the whole heap. In wrestling [however] one cannot escape so; he being the particular object of the enemy’s fury, must needs be shaken and tried to purpose. Indeed the word ‘wrestling’ signifies such a strife as makes the body shake again². Satan hath not only a general malice against the army of saints, but a spite against thee John, thee Joan; he will single thee out for his enemy. We find Jacob when alone, a man wrestled with him. As God delights to have private communion with his single saints, so the devil [delights] to try it hand to hand with the Christian when he gets him alone. As we lose much

comfort when we do not apply the promise and providence of God to our particular persons and conditions—God loves me, pardons me, takes care of me. The water at the town-conduit doth me no good, if I want a pipe to empty it into my cistern; so it obstructs our care and watchfulness, when we conceive of Satan’s wrath and fury as bent in general against the saints, and not against me in particular. O how careful would a soul be in duty, if, as going to church or closet, he had such a serious meditation as this: Now Satan is at my heels to hinder me in my work, if my God help me not!

Second. It is a close combat. Armies fight at some distance. Wrestlers grapple hand to hand. An arrow shot from afar may be seen and shunned, but when the enemy hath hold of one there is no declining, but either he must resist manfully, or fall shamefully at his enemy’s foot. Satan comes close up, and gets within the Christian, takes his hold of his very flesh and corrupt nature, and by this shakes him.

SECOND. The universality of the combat. ‘We wrestle’ comprehends all. On purpose you may perceive the apostle changeth the pronoun ye in the former verse, into we in this, that he may include himself as well as them; as if he had said, The quarrel is with every saint. Satan neither fears to assault the minister, nor despiseth to wrestle with the meanest saint in the congregation. Great and small, minister and people, all must wrestle; not one part of Christ’s army in the field, and the other at ease in their quarters, where no enemy comes. Here are enemies enough to engage all at once.

THIRD. The permanency or duration of this combat; and that lies in the tense we wrestle. Not, our wrestling was at first conversion, but now over, and we passed the pikes; not, we shall wrestle when

1. εστιν ἡμιν ἡ παλη.

2. quia corpus παλλεται.

sickness comes, and death comes; but our wrestling is; the enemy is ever in sight of us, yea, in fight with us. There is an evil of every day's temptation, which, like Paul's bonds, abides us wherever we be come. So that these particulars summed up will amount to this point.

[The Christian's life here is a continual wrestling with sin and Satan.]

DOCTRINE. The Christian's life is a continual wrestling. He is, as Jeremiah said of himself, born 'a man of strife.' Or what the prophet [said] to Asa, may be said to every Christian; 'From hence thou shalt have wars:' from thy spiritual birth to thy natural death; from the hour when thou first didst set thy face to heaven, till thou shalt set thy foot in heaven. Israel's march out of Egypt was, in gospel-sense, our taking the field against sin and Satan; and when had they peace?—not till they lodged their colours in Canaan. No condition wherein the Christian is, here below, is quiet. Is it prosperity or adversity? here is work for both hands, to keep pride and security down in the one, faith and patience up in the other; no place which the Christian can call privileged ground. Lot in Sodom wrestled with the wicked inhabitants thereof; his righteous soul being vexed with their unclean conversation. And how fares he at Zoar? Do not his own daughters bring a spark of Sodom's fire into his own bed, whereby he is inflamed with lust? Some have thought if they were but in such a family, under such a ministry, out of such occasions, O then they should never be tempted as now they are! I confess change of air is a great help to weak nature, and these forenamed as van tage-ground against Satan; but thinkest thou to fly from Satan's presence thus? No, though thou shouldst take the wings of the morning he would fly after thee; these may make him change his method in tempting, but not lay down his designs; so long as his old friend is alive within, he will be knocking at thy door without. No duty can be performed without wrestling. The Christian needs his sword as much as his trowel. He wrestles with a body of flesh; [and] this to the Christian in duty is as the beast to the traveller, he cannot go his journey without it, and [has] much ado to go with it. If the flesh be kept high and lusty, then it is wanton and will not

obey; if low, then it is weak and soon tires. Thus the Christian rids but little ground, because he must go his weak body's pace. He wrestles with a body of sin as well as of flesh; this mutters and murmurs when the soul is taking up any duty, so that he cannot do what he would. As Paul said, I would have come once and again, but Satan hindered me. I would have prayed, may the Christian say, at such a time, and meditated on the word I heard, the mercies I received at another [time], but this enemy hindered. It is true indeed, grace sways the sceptre in such a soul; yet, as school-boys taking their time when the master is abroad, do shut him out, and for a while lord it in misrule, though they are whipped for it afterwards, thus the unregenerate part takes advantage when grace is not on its watch to disturb its government, and shut it out from duty. Though this at last makes the soul more severe in mortifying, yet it costs some scuffle before it can recover its throne; and when it cannot shut from duty, yet is the Christian woefully yoked with it in duty. It cannot do what it doth as it would. Many a letter in its copy doth this enemy spoil, while he jogs him with impertinent thoughts. When the Christian is a praying, then Satan and the flesh are a prating; he cries, and they louder to put him out or drown his cry. Thus we see the Christian is assailed on every side by his enemy; and how can it be other, when the seeds of war are laid deep in the natures of both, which can never be rooted up till the devil cease to be a devil, sin to be sin, and the saint to be a saint? Though wolves may snarl at one another, yet are soon quiet again, because the quarrel is not in their nature; but the wolf and the lamb can never be made friends. Sin will lust against grace, and grace draw upon sin, whenever they meet.

[Reproof to such as are not true wrestlers.]

First. This may reprove such as wrestle; but against whom? against God, not against sin and Satan. These are bold men indeed, who dare try a fall with the Almighty; yet such there are, and a woe [is] pronounced against them, Isa. 45:9 'Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker.' It is easy to tell which of these will be worsted. What can he do but break his shins that dasheth them against a rock? A goodly battle there is like to be, when thorns contest with

fire, and stubble with flame. But where live those giants that dare enter the list with the great God? What are their names, that we may know them, and brand them for creatures above all other unworthy to live? Take heed, O thou who askest, that the wretched man whom thou seekest so to defy, be not found in thy own clothes itself. Judas was the traitor, though he would not answer to his name, but put it off with a 'Master, is it I?' And so mayest thou be the fighter against God. The heart is deceitful. Even holy David, for all his anger, was so hot against the rich man, that took away the poor man's ewe-lamb, that he bound it with an oath, [that] the man should not live who had done it, yet proves at last to be himself the man, as the prophet told him, II Sam. 12. Now there are two ways wherein men wrestle against God. 1. When they wrestle against his Spirit, 2. When they wrestle against his providence.

1. When they wrestle against his Spirit. We read of the Spirit striving against the creature, 'My spirit shall not always strive with man,' Gen. 6:3, where the striving is not in anger and wrath to destroy them—that God could do without any stir or scuffle—but a loving strife and contest with man. The old world was running with such a career headlong into their ruin, [that] he sends his Spirit to interpose, and by his counsels and reproofs to offer, as it were, to stop them and reclaim them; as if one seeing another ready to offer violence on himself, should strive to get the knife out of his hand, with which he would do the mischief; or one that hath a purse of gold in his hand to give, should follow another by all manner of entreaties, striving with him to accept and take it. Such a kind of strife is this of the Spirit's with men. They are the lusts of men—those bloody instruments of death, with which sinners are mischieving themselves—that the Holy Spirit strives by his sweet counsels and entreaties to get out of our hands. They are Christ's grace and eternal life [that] he strives to make us accept at the hands of God's mercy; and for repulsing the Spirit thus striving with them, sinners are justly counted fighters against God. 'Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost,' Acts 7:51. Now there is a twofold striving of the Spirit, and so of our wrestling against it.

(1.) The Spirit strives in his messengers with sin-

ners. They coming on his errand, and not their own, he voucheth the faithful counsels, reproofs, and exhortations which they give us as his own act. [What] Noah, that preacher of righteousness, said to the old world is called the preaching of the Spirit, I Peter 3:19. The pains that Moses, Aaron, and other servants of God took in instructing Israel, is called the instruction of the Spirit, Neh. 9:20; so that when the word, which God's ministers bring in his name, is rejected, the faithful counsels they give are thrown at sinners' heels and made light of; then do they strive with the Spirit, and wrestle against Christ as really, as if he visibly in his own person had been in the pulpit, and preached the same sermon to them. When God comes to reckon with sinners, it will prove so. Then God will rub up your memories, and mind you of his striving with you, and your unkind resisting him. They, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, shall know here hath been a prophet among them, Eze. 2:5. Now men soon forget whom and what they hear. Ask them what was pressed upon their consciences in such a sermon. They have forgot. What were the precious truths laid out in another?—and they are lost. And well were it for them if their memories were no better in another world; it would ease their torments more than a little. But then they shall know they had a prophet among them, and what a price they had with them in their hands, though it was in fools' keeping. They shall know what he was, and what he said, though a thousand years past, as fresh as if it were done but last night. The more zealous and compassionate, the more painful and powerful he was in his place, the greater shall their sin be found, to break from such holy violence offered to do them good. Surely God will have something for their sweat, yea, lives of his servants which were worn out in striving with such rebellious ones. May be yet, sinners, your firmament is clear, no cloud to be seen that portends a storm; but know, as you use to say, winter does not rot in the clouds; you shall have it at last. Every threatening which your faithful ministers have denounced against you out of the Word, God is bound to make good. He confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers, Isa. 44:26, and that in judgment against sinners, confirming the threatenings, as well as in mercy performing the promises, which they declare as the

portion of his children. But it will be time enough to ask such on a sick-bed, or a dying hour, whether the words of the Lord delivered by their faithful preachers have not taken hold of them. Some have confessed with horror [that] they have; as the Jews—'Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, so hath he dealt with us,' Zech. 1:6.

(2.) The Spirit strives with men more immediately, when he makes his inward approaches to the consciences of men, debating in their own bosoms the case with them. One while he shows them their sins in their bloody colours, and whither they shall surely bring them, if not looked to timely, which he doth so convincingly, that the creature smells sometimes the very fire and brimstone about him, and is at present in a temporary hell; another while he falls a parleying and treating with them, making gracious overtures to the sinner, if he will return at his reproof, presents the grace of the gospel, and opens a door of hope for his recovery, yea, falls a wooing and beseeching of him to throw down his rebellious arms, and come to Christ for life, whose heart is in a present disposition to receive and embrace the first motion the returning sinner makes for mercy. Now when the Spirit of God follows the sinner from place to place, and time to time, suggesting such motions, and renewing his old suit, and the creature shall fling out of the Spirit's hands, thus striving with him,³ [the thing being unaccomplished], as far from renouncing his lusts, or taking any liking to Christ as ever. This is to resist the Spirit to his face, and it carries so much malignity in it, that even where it hath not been final, poor humbled souls [so] over-set with the horror of it, that they could not for a long time be persuaded but that it was the unpardonable sin. Take heed therefore, sinners, how you use the Spirit when he comes knocking at the door of your hearts. Open at his knock, and he will be your guest; you shall have his sweet company. Repulse him, and you have not a promise he will knock again. And if once he leave striving with thee, unhappy man, thou art lost for ever; thou liest like a ship cast up by the waves upon some high rock, where the tide [will] never come to fetch it off. Thou mayest come to the Word, converse with other ordin-

ances, but in vain. It is the Spirit in them, which is both tide and wind, to set the soul afloat, and carry it on, or else it lies like a ship on dry ground which stirs not.

2. We wrestle against God when we wrestle with his providence; and that in two ways.

(1.) When we are discontented with his providential dispose of us. God's carving for us doth not please us so, but that we are objecting against his dealings towards us, at least muttering something with the fool in our hearts, which God hears as lightly as man our words. God counts then we begin to quarrel with him, when we do not acquiesce in, and say amen to his providence, whatever it is. He calls it a contending with the Almighty, Job 40:2, yea, a reproving of God. And he is a bold man sure that dare find fault with God, and article against heaven. God challengeth him, whoever he is, that doth this, to answer it at his peril. 'He that reproveth God, let him answer it,' ver. 2 of the chapter forementioned. It was high time for Job to have done, when he hears what a sense God puts upon those unwary words which dropped from him in the anguish of his spirit and paroxysm of his sufferings. Contend with the Almighty? Reprove God? Good man, how blank he is, and cries out, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Let God but pardon what is past, and he shall hear such language no more. O, sirs, Take heed of this wrestling above all other. Contention is uncomfortable, with whomsoever it is we fall out—Neighbours or friends, wife or husband, children or servants, but worst of all with God. If God cannot please thee, but thy heart riseth against him, what hopes are there of thy pleasing him, who will take nothing kindly from that man who is angry with him? And how can love to God be preserved in a discontented heart, that is always muttering against him? Love cannot think any evil of God, nor endure to hear any speak evil of him, but it must take God's part, as Jonathan David's, when Saul spake basely of him; and when it cannot be heard, will like him arise and be gone. When afflicted, love can allow thee to groan, but not to grumble. If thou wilt ease thy encumbered spirit into God's bosom by prayer, and humbly wrestle with God on thy knees, love is for thee, and will help thee to the best arguments thou canst use to God; but if thou wilt vent thy distem-

3. Re infecta.

pered passions, and show a mutinous spirit against God, this stabs it to the heart.

(2.) We wrestle against providence, when incorrigible under the various dispensations of God toward us. Providence has a voice if we had an ear. Mercies should draw, afflictions drive. Now when neither fair means nor foul do is good, but we are impenitent under both; this is to wrestle against God with both hands. Either of these have their peculiar aggravations: one is against love, and so disingenuous; the other is against the smart of his rod, and therein we slight his anger, and are cruel to ourselves in kicking against the pricks. Mercy should make us ashamed, wrath afraid to sin. He that is not ashamed, has not the spirit of a man. He that is not afraid when smitten, is worse than the beast who stands in awe of whip and spur. Sometimes mercy, especially these outward mercies, which have a pleasing relish to the carnal part in a Christian, hath proved a snare to the best of men, but then affliction useth to recover them. But when affliction makes men worse, and they harden themselves against God, to sin more and more while the rod is on them; what is like to reclaim them? Few are made better by prosperity, whom afflictions make worse. He that will sin, though he goes in pain, will much more, if that once be gone. But take heed of this contesting with God. There is nothing got by scuffling with God, but blows, or worse. If he say he will afflict thee no more, it is even the worst he can say; it is as much as if he should say he will be in thy debt till another world, and there pay thee altogether. But if he means thee mercy, thou shalt hear from him in some sharper affliction than ever. He hath wedges that can rive thee, wert thou a more knotty piece than thou art. Are there yet the treasures of wickedness, and the scant measure that is abominable? saith God to Israel. What! incorrigible, though the Lord's voice crieth unto the city, Micah 6:9, bidding you hear the rod, and him that hath appointed it? See what course God resolves on. Therefore will I make thee sick in smiting of thee, ver. 13. As if he had said, My other physic, I see, was too weak, it did not work or turn your stomach, but I will prepare a potion that shall make you sick at heart.

Second. It reproves those who seem to wrestle against sin, but not according to the word of command that Christ gives. There is a law in wrestling

which must be observed. If a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned except he strive lawfully, II Tim. 2:5. He alludes to the Roman games, to which there were judges appointed to see that no foul play were offered contrary to the law of wrestling; the prize being denied to such though they did foil their adversary; which the apostle improves to make the Christian careful in his war, as being under a stricter law and discipline, that requires not only valour to fight, but obedience to fight by order and according to the word of command. Now few do this that go for great wrestlers.

1. Some while they wrestle against one sin, embrace another, and in this case it is not [that] the person wrestles against sin, but one sin wrestles against another, and it is no wonder to see thieves fall out when they come to divide the spoil. Lusts are diverse, Titus 3:3, and it is hard to please many masters, especially when their commands are so contrary. When pride bids lay on in bravery, lavish out in entertainment, covetousness bids lay up; when malice bids revenge, carnal policy saith, Conceal thy wrath, though not forgive. When lust sends to his whores, hypocrisy pulls him back for shame of the world. Now is he God's champion that resist one sin at the command of another, it may be a worse?

2. Some wrestle, but they are pressed into the field, not volunteers. Their slavish fears scare them at present from their lust, so that the combat is rather betwixt their conscience and will, than them and your lust. Give me such a sin, saith will. No, saith conscience, it will scald; and throws it away. A man may love the wine, though he is loath to have his lips burned. Hypocrites themselves are afraid to burn. In such combats the will at last prevails, either by bribing the understanding to present the lust it desires in a more pleasing dress, that conscience may not be scared with such hideous apparitions of wrath; or by pacifying conscience with some promise of repentance for the future; or by forbearing some sin for the present, which it can best spare, thereby to gain the reputation of something like a reformation. Or if all this will not do, then, prompted by the fury of its lust, the will proclaims open war against conscience, sinning in the face of it, like some wild horse, [which] impatient of the spur which pricks him and bridle that curbs him, gets the bit between his teeth, and

runs with full speed, till at last he easeth himself of his rider; and then where he sees fattest pasture, no hedge or ditch can withhold him, till in the end you find him starving in some pound for his trespass. Thus, many sin at such rate, that conscience can no longer hold the reins nor sit the saddle, but is thrown down and laid for dead; and then the wretches range where their lusts can have the fullest meal, till at last they pay for their stolen pleasures most dearly, when conscience comes to itself, pursues them, and takes them more surely by the throat than ever, never to let them go till it brings them before God's tribunal.

3. Others wrestle with sin, but they do not hate it, and therefore they are favourable to it, and seek not the life of sin as their deadly enemy. These wrestle in jest, and not in earnest; the wounds they give sin one day, are healed by the next. Let men resolve never so strongly against sin, yet will it creep again into their favour, till the love of sin be quenched in the heart; and this fire will never die of itself, the love of Christ must quench the love of sin, as Jerome [saith] excellently⁴ [one love extinguishes another.] This heavenly fire will indeed put out the flame of hell; which he illustrates by Ahasuerus' carriage to Vashti his queen, who in the first chapter makes a decree in all haste that she comes no more before him; but when his passion is a little down, Est. 2:1, he begins to relent towards her; which his council perceiving, presently seek out for a beautiful virgin, on whom the king might place his love, and take into his royal bed; which done, we hear no more of Vashti. Then and not till then will the soul's decree stand against sin, when the soul hath taken Christ into his bosom.

[How the true wrestlers
should manage their combat.]

Direction to the saints. Seeing your life is a continual wrestling here on earth, it is our wisdom to study how you may best manage the combat with your worst enemy; which that you may do, take these few directions.

First. Look thou goest not into the field without thy second. My meaning is, engage God by prayer to

stand at thy back. God is in a league offensive and defensive with thee, but he looks to be called. Did the Ephraimites take it ill, that Gideon called them not into the field, and may not God much more? as if thou meantst to steal a victory before he should know it. Thou hast more valour than Moses, who would not stir without God, no, though he sent an angel for his lieutenant. Thou art wiser than Jacob, who to overcome Esau, now marching up, turns from him, and falls upon God; he knew if he could wrestle with God, he might trust God to deal with his brother. Engage God and the back-door is shut, no enemy can come behind thee, yea, thine enemy shall fall before thee. God turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness, saith David. Heaven saith amen to his prayer, and the wretch hangs himself.

Second. Be very careful of giving thine enemy hand-hold. Wrestlers strive to fasten upon some part or other, which gives them advantage more easily to throw their adversary; to prevent which, they used—1. To lay aside their garments; 2. To anoint their bodies.

1. Christian, labour to put off the old man which is most personal, that corruption which David calls his own iniquity, Ps. 18:23. This is the skirt which Satan lays hold of; observe what it is, and mortify it daily; then Satan will retreat with shame, when he sees the head of that enemy upon the wall, which should have betrayed thee into his hands.

2. The Roman wrestlers used to anoint their bodies. So do thou; bathe thy soul with the frequent meditations of Christ's love. Satan will find little welcome, where Christ's love dwells; love will kindle love, and that will be as a wall of fire to keep off Satan; it will make thee disdain the offer of a sin, and as oil, supple the joints, and make [thee] agile to offend thy enemy. Think how Christ wrestled in thy quarrel; sin, hell, and wrath had all come full mouth upon thee, had not he coped with them in the way. And canst thou find in thy heart to requite his love, by betraying his glory into the hands of sin, by cowardice or treachery. Say not thou lovest him, so long as thou canst lay those sins in thy bosom which plucked his heart out of his bosom. It were strange if a child should keep, and delight to use, no other knife, but that wherewith his father was stabbed.

Third. Improve the advantage, thou gettest at

4. Unus amor extinguit alium.

any time, wisely. Sometimes, the Christian hath his enemy on the hip, yea, on the ground, can set his foot on the very neck of his pride, and throw away his unbelief, as a thing absurd and unreasonable. Now, as a wise wrestler, fall with all thy weight upon thine enemy. Though man think it foul play to strike when his adversary is down, yet do not thou so compliment with sin, as to let it breathe or rise. Take heed thou beest not charged of God, as once Ahab, for letting go this enemy now in thy hands, whom God hath appointed to destruction. Learn a little wisdom of the serpent's brood, who, when they had Christ under their foot, never thought they had him sure enough, no, not when dead; and therefore both seal and watch his grave. Thus do thou, to hinder the resurrection of thy sin, seal it down with stronger purposes, solemn covenants, and watch it by a wakeful circumspect walking.

[Use or Application.]

Use First. [Consolation.] This is a ground of consolation to the weak Christian, who disputes against the truth of his grace, from the inward conflicts and fightings he hath with his lusts, and is ready to say like Gideon, in regard of outward enemies, 'If God be with me, why is all this befallen me?' Why do I find such strugglings in me, provoking me to sin, pulling me back from that which is good? Why dost [thou] ask? The answer is soon given; because thou art a wrestler, not a conqueror. Thou mistakest the state of a Christian in this life. When one is made a Christian, he is not presently called to triumph over his slain enemies, but carried into the field to meet and fight them. The state of grace is the commencing of a war against sin, not the ending of it; rather than thou shalt not have an enemy to wrestle with, God himself will come in a disguise into the field, and appear to be thine enemy. Thus when Jacob was alone, a man wrestled with him until breaking of the day; and therefore set thy heart at rest if this be thy scruple. Thy soul may rather take comfort in this, that thou art a wrestler. This struggling within thee, if upon the right ground, and to the right end, doth evidence there are two nations within thee, two contrary natures, the one from earth, earthly, and the other from heaven, heavenly; yea, for thy further

comfort, know [that] though thy corrupt nature be the elder, yet it shall serve the younger.

Use Second. [Hope of triumph.] O how should this make the Christian long to be gone home, where there is none of this stir and scuffle! It is strange, that every hour seems not a day, and every day a year, till death sounds thy joyful retreat, and calls thee off the field—where the bullets fly so thick, and thou art fighting for thy life with thy deadly enemies—to come to court, where not swords, but palms are seen in the saints' hands; not drums, but harps; not groans of bleedingsoldiers and wounded consciences, but sweet and ravishing music is heard of triumphing victors carolling the praises of God and the Lamb, through whom they have overcome. Well, Christians, while you are below, comfort yourselves with these things. There is a place of rest remaining for the people of God. You do not beat the air, but wrestle for a heaven that is yonder above the clouds; you have your worst first, the best will follow. You wrestle but to win a crown, and win to wear it, yea, wear, never to lose it, which once on, none shall ever take off, or put you to the hazard of battle more. Here we overcome to fight again; the battle of one temptation may be over, but the war remains. What peace can we have as long as devils can come abroad out of their holes, or anything of sinful nature remains in ourselves unmortified? [This nature] will even fight upon its knees, and strike with one arm while the other is cut off; but when death comes, the last stroke is struck. This good physician will perfectly cure thee of thy spiritual blindness and lameness,—as the martyr told his fellow at the stake, bloody Bonner would do their bodily. What is it, Christian, which takes away the joy of thy life, but the wrestlings and combats which this bosom-enemy puts thee to? Is not this the Peninnah that, vexing and disturbing thy spirit, hath kept thee off many a sweet meal, thou mightest have had in communion with God and his saints?—or if thou hast come, hath made thee cover the altar of God with thy tears and groans? And will it not be a happy hand that cuts the knot, and sets thee loose from thy deadness, hypocrisy, pride, and what not, wherewith thou wert yoked? It is life which is thy loss, and death which is thy gain. Be but willing to endure the rending of this vail of thy flesh, and thou art where thou wouldst be, out of the reach of sin, at

rest in the bosom of thy God. And why should a short evil of pain affright thee more, than the deliverance from a continual torment of sin's evil ravish thee? Some you know have chosen to be cut, rather than to be ground daily with the stone, and yet, may be, their pain comes again; and canst thou not quietly think of dying, to be delivered from the torment of these sins, never to return more? And yet that is not the half that death doth for thee. Peace is sweet after

war, ease after pain; but what tongue can express what joy, what glory must fill the creature at the first sight of God and that blessed company? None but one that dwells there can tell. Did we know more of that blissful state, we ministers should find it as hard a work to persuade Christians to be willing to live here so long, as now it is, to persuade them to be willing to die so soon.

DIRECTION II.—SECOND GENERAL PART.

[CHARACTER OF THE ASSAILANTS OR ENEMIES WITH WHOM THE CHRISTIAN IS TO WRESTLE.]

‘Not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places,’ Eph. 6:12.

The assailants that appear in arms against the Christian, or the enemies with whom he is to wrestle, are described, **FIRST**, Negatively, ‘not against flesh and blood,’ or rather comparatively, not chiefly against flesh and blood. **SECOND**, Positively, ‘but against principalities and powers,’ &c.

DIVISION FIRST.—THE ASSAILANTS DESCRIBED NEGATIVELY. ‘Not against flesh and blood.’

We are not to take the **NEGATIVE** part of the description for a pure negation, as if we had no conflict with flesh and blood, but wholly and solely to engage against Satan; but by way of comparison, not only with flesh and blood, and in some sense not chiefly. It is usual in Scripture such manner of phrase: Call not thy friends to dinner, but the poor, Luke 14:12; that is, not only those, so as to neglect the poor. Now, what is meant here by flesh and blood? There is a double interpretation of the words.

[What is meant by flesh and blood.]

FIRST. By flesh and blood may be meant our own bosom corruptions; that sin which is in our corrupt nature, so oft called flesh in the Scripture—‘the flesh lusteth against the Spirit;’ and sometimes flesh and blood, ‘Flesh and blood hath not revealed this;’ Matt. 16:17, that is, this confession thou hast made comes from above; thy fleshly corrupt mind could never have found out this supernatural truth, thy sinful will could never have embraced it. ‘Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,’ 1 Cor. 15:50; that is, sinful mortal flesh; as it is expounded in the words following. I consulted not with flesh and blood, Gal. 1:16; that is, carnal reason. Now this bosom enemy may be called flesh, **First**. Partly from its derivation, and **Second**. Partly from its operation.

First. Partly from its derivation, because it is derived and propagated to us by natural generation.

Thus Adam is said to beget a son in his own likeness, sinful as he was, as well as mortal and miserable; yea, the holiest saint on earth having flesh in him, derives this corrupt and sinful nature to his child, as the circumcised Jew begat an uncircumcised child; and the wheat cleansed and fanned, being sown, comes up with a husk. ‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh,’ John 3:6.

Second. It is called flesh, partly from the operations of this corrupt nature, which are fleshly and carnal. The reasonings of the corrupt mind [are] fleshly; therefore [it is] called the carnal mind, incapable indeed of the things of God, which it neither doth nor can perceive. as the sun doth hide the heavens which are above it from us, while it reveals things beneath⁵, so carnal reason leaves the creature in the dark concerning spiritual truths, when it is most able to conceive and discourse of creature excellences, and carnal interests here below. What a childish question for so wise a man, did Nicodemus put to Christ! though Christ to help him did wrap his speech in a carnal phrase. If fleshly reason cannot understand spiritual truths when thus accommodated, and the notions of the gospel translated into its own language, what skill is it like to have of them, if put to read them in their original tongue? I mean, if this garment of carnal expression were taken off, and spiritual truths in their

5. Obsignare superiora dum revelat inferiora.

naked hue presented to its view. The motions of the natural will are carnal, and therefore ‘they that are after the flesh,’ Rom. 8:5, are said to ‘mind the things of the flesh.’ All its desires, delights, cares, fears, are in, and of, carnal things; it favours spiritual food no more than an angel fleshly. What we cannot relish we will hardly make our daily food⁶. Every creature hath its proper diet; the lion eats not grass, nor the horse flesh; what is food to the carnal heart, is poison to the gracious; and that which is pleasing to the gracious, is distasteful to the carnal.

Now according to this interpretation, the sense of the apostle is not as if the Christian had no combat with his corrupt nature, for in another place it is said, the Spirit lusts against the flesh, and the flesh against the Spirit—and this enemy is called the sin that besets the Christian round—but to aggravate his conflict with this enemy by the access of a foreign power, Satan, who strikes in with this domestic enemy. As if while a king is fighting with his own mutinous subjects, some outlandish troops should join with them; now he may be said, not to fight with his subjects, but with a foreign power. The Christian wrestles not with his naked corruptions, but with Satan in them. Were there no devil, yet we should have our hands full, in resisting the corruptions of our own hearts; but the access of this enemy makes the battle more terrible, because he heads them who is a captain so skilful and experienced. Our sin is the engine, Satan is the engineer; lust the bait, Satan the angler. When a soul is enticed by his own lust, he is said to be tempted, James 1:14, because Satan and our own lust concur to the completing the sin.

Use First. Let us make thee, Christian, ply the work of mortification close. It is no policy to let thy lusts have arms, which are sure to rise and declare against thee when thine enemy comes. Achish’s nobles did but wisely, in that they would not trust David in their army when to fight against Israel, lest in the battle he should be an adversary to them; and darest thou go to duty, or engage in any action, where Satan will appear against thee, and not endeavour to make sure of thy pride, unbelief, &c., that they join not with thine enemy?

Use Second. Are Satan and thy own flesh against thee—not single corruption, but edged with his policy, and backed by his power? See then what need thou hast of more help than thy own grace. Take heed of grappling with him in the strength of thy naked grace; here thou hast two to one against thee. Satan was too hard for Adam, though he went so well appointed into the field, because left to himself; much more easily will he foil thee. Cling therefore about thy God for strength; get him with thee, and then, though a worm, thou shalt be able to deal with this serpent.

SECOND. Flesh and blood is interpreted as a periphrasis of man. ‘We wrestle not with flesh and blood,’ that is, not with man, who is here described by that part which chiefly distinguisheth him from the angelic nature. Touch me, saith Christ, and handle me, a spirit hath not flesh. Now, according to this interpretation, [observe these particulars]. First. How meanly the Spirit of God speaks of man. Second. Where he lays the stress of the saint’s battle; not in resisting flesh and blood, but principalities and powers. Where the apostle excludes not our combat with man, for the war is against the serpent and his seed;—as wide as the world is, it cannot peaceably hold the saints and wicked together. But his intent is to show what a complicated enemy—man’s wrath and Satan’s interwoven together—we have to deal with.

[How the Christian doth not wrestle
with flesh and blood.]

First. How meanly doth the Spirit of God speak of man, calling him flesh and blood! Man hath a heaven-born soul, which makes him akin to angels, yea, to the God of them, who is the Father of spirits; but this is passed by in silence, as if God would not own that which is tainted with sin, and not the creature God at first made it; or because the soul, though of such noble extraction, yet being so immersed in sensuality, deserves no other name than flesh, which part of man levels him with the beast, and is here intended to express the weakness and frailty of man’s nature. It is the phrase [by] which the Holy Ghost expresseth the weakness and impotency of a creature by. ‘They are men, and their horses are flesh’, Isa. 31:3, that is, weak; as on the contrary, when he would

6. Omnis vita gustu ducitur.

set out the power and strength of a thing, he opposeth it to flesh—‘Our weapons are not carnal, but mighty,’ II Cor. 10:4. And so in the text, not flesh and blood, but powers. As if he should say, ‘Had you no other to fear but a weak sorry man, it were not worth the providing arms or ammunition; but you have enemies that neither are flesh, nor are resisted with flesh.’ So that here we see what a weak creature man is, not only weaker than angels, as they are spirit and he flesh—put in some sense beneath the beasts, as the flesh of man is frailer than the flesh of beasts; therefore the Spirit of God compares man to the grass, which soon withers, and his goodliness to the flower of the field, Isa. 40:6. Yea, he is called vanity. ‘Men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie,’ Ps. 62:9. Both alike vain; only the rich and the great man’s vanity is covered with honour, wealth, &c., which are here called a lie, because they are not what they seem, and so worse than plain vanity, which is known to be so, and deceives not.

Use First. Is man but frail flesh? Let this humble thee, O man, in all thy excellency; flesh is but one remove from filth and corruption. Thy soul is the salt that keeps thee sweet, or else thou wouldst stink above ground. Is it thy beauty thou primest in? Flesh is grass, but beauty is the vanity of this vanity. This goodliness is like the flower, which lasts not so long as the grass, appears in its mouth and is gone; yea, like the beauty of the flower, which fades while the flower stands. How soon will time’s plough make furrows in thy face, yea, one fit of an ague so change thy countenance, as shall make thy dotting lovers afraid to look on thee? Is it strength? Alas, it is an arm of flesh, which withers oft in the stretching forth. Ere long thy blood, which is now warm, will freeze in thy veins; thy spring crowned with May-buds will tread on December’s heel; thy marrow dry in thy bones, thy sinews shrink, thy legs bow under the weight of thy body; thy eye-strings crack; thy tongue [be] not able to call for help; yea, thy heart with thy flesh shall fail. And now thou who art such a giant, take a turn of thou canst in thy chamber, yea, raise but thy head from thy pillow if thou art able, or call back thy breath, which is making haste to be gone out of thy nostrils, never to return more; and darest thou glory in that which so soon may be prostrate?

Is it wisdom? The same grave that covers thy

body, shall bury all that—the wisdom of thy flesh I mean—all thy thoughts shall perish, and [thy] goodly plots come to nothing. Indeed, if a Christian, thy thoughts as such shall ascend with thee, not one holy breathing of thy soul lost. Is it thy blood and birth? Whoever thou art, thou art base-born till born again; the same blood runs in thy veins with the beggar in the street, Acts 17:26. All nations there we find made of the same blood; in two things all are alike, we come in and go out of the world alike; as one is not made of finer earth, so not resolved into purer dust.

Use Second. Is man flesh? Trust not in man; ‘cursed be he that makes flesh his arm!’ not the mighty man; robes may hide and garnish, they cannot change flesh. Put not your trust in princes, Ps. 146:3; alas, they cannot keep their crowns on their own heads, their heads on their own shoulders; and look-est thou for that which they cannot give themselves? Not in wise men, whose designs recoil oft upon themselves, that they cannot perform their enterprise⁷. Man’s carnal wisdom intends one thing, but God turns the wheel and brings forth another. Trust not in holy men, they have flesh, and so their judgment [is] not infallible, yea, their way [is] sometimes doubtful. His mistake may lead thee aside, and though he returns, thou mayest go on and perish. Trust not in any man, in all man, no not in thyself, thou art flesh. He is a fool, saith the wise man, that trusts his heart. Not in the best thou art or doest; the garment of thy righteousness is spotted with the flesh; all is counted by St. Paul confidence in the flesh, besides our rejoicing in Christ, Php. 3:3.

Use Third. Is man but flesh? Fear him not. This was David’s resolve: ‘I will not fear what flesh can do unto me,’ Ps. 56:4. Thou needest not, thou oughtest not to fear. Thou needest not. What, not such a great man, not such a number of men, who have the keys of all the prisons at their girdle, who can kill or save alive! no, not these. Only look they be thy enemies for righteousness’ sake. Take heed thou makest not the least child thine enemy by offering wrong to him; God will right the wicked even

7. Amphora coepit

Institui; currente rota, cur urceus exit?

— Horace, A.P. 22.

upon the saint. If he offends, he shall find no shelter under God's wing for his sin. This made Jerome complain that the Christians' sins made the arms of those barbarous nations which invaded Christendom victorious⁸. But if man's wrath finds thee in God's way, and his fury take fire at thy holiness, thou needest not fear, though thy life be the prey he hunts for. Flesh can only wound flesh; he may kill thee, but not hurt thee. Why shouldst thou fear to be stripped of that which thou hast resigned already to Christ? It is the first lesson thou leamest, if a Christian, to deny thyself, to take up thy cross, and follow thy Master; so that the enemy comes too late. Thou hast no life to lose, because thou hast given it already to Christ, nor can man take away that without God's leave. All thou hast is insured; and though God hath not promised thee immunity from suffering in this kind, yet he hath undertaken to bear thy loss, yea, to pay thee a hundredfold; and thou shalt not stay for it till another world. Again, thou oughtest not to fear flesh. Our Saviour Matt. 10, thrice in the compass of six verses, commands us not to fear man. If thy heart quail at him, how wilt thou behave thyself in the list against Satan, whose little finger is heavier than man's loins? The Romans had⁹ weapons rebated or cudgels, which they were tried at before they came to the sharp. If thou canst not bear a bruise in thy flesh from man's cudgel and blunt weapon, what wilt thou do when thou shalt have Satan's sword in thy side? God counts himself reproached when his children fear a sorry man; therefore we are bid, Sanctify the Lord, and not to fear the fear. Now if thou wouldst not fear man who is but flesh, labour [to do these two things],

1. Mortify thy own flesh. Flesh only fears flesh; when the soul degenerates into carnal desires and delights, no wonder he falls into carnal fears. Have a care, Christian, thou bringest not thyself into bondage. Perhaps thy heart feeds on the applause of men, this will make thee afraid to be evil spoken of, as those who shuffled with Christ, John 12:42; owning him in private when they durst not confess him openly, for they loved the praise of men. David saith the mouth of the wicked is an open sepulchre; and in this grave

8. Nostris peccatis fortes sunt barbari.

9. Arma procluseria.

hath many a saint's name been buried. But if this fleshly desire were mortified, thou wouldst not pass to be judged by man; and so of all carnal affections. Some meat you observe is aguish; if thou settest thy heart on anything that is carnal—wife, child, estate, &c.—these will incline thee to a base fear of man, who may be God's messenger to afflict thee in these.

2. Set faith against flesh. Faith fixeth the heart, and a fixed heart is not readily afraid. Physicians tell us we are never so subject to receive infection as when the spirits are low, and therefore the antidotes they give are all cordials. When the spirit is low through unbelief, every threatening from man makes sad impression. Let thy faith take but a deep draught of the promises, and thy courage will rise.

Use Fourth. Is man but flesh? Comfort thyself, Christian, with this, that as thou art flesh, so thy heavenly Father knows it, and considers thee for it.

1. In point of affliction; Ps. 103:14, 'He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.' Not like some unskilful empiric, who hath but one receipt for all, strong or weak, young or old; but as a wise physician considers his patient, and then writes his bill. Men and devils are but God's apothecaries, they make not our physic, but give what God prescribes. Balaam loved Balak's fee well enough, but could not go an hair's breadth beyond God's commission. Indeed God is not so choice with the wicked; 'Hath he smitten him, as he smote those that smote him?' Isa. 27:7. In a saint's cup the poison of affliction is corrected, not so in the wicked's; and therefore what is medicine to the one is ruin to the other.

2. In duty. He knows you are but flesh, and therefore pities and accepts thy weak service, yea, he makes apologies for thee. The spirit is willing, saith Christ, but the flesh is weak.

3. In temptations. He considers thou art flesh and, and proportions the temptations to so weak a nature. It is called¹⁰ such a temptation as is common to man; a moderate temptation, as in the margin, fitted for so frail a creature. Whenever the Christian begins to faint under the weight of it, God makes as much haste to his succour, as a tender mother would to her swooning child; therefore he is said to be nigh,

10. πειρασμὸς ἀνθρωπίνος.

to revive such, lest their spirit should fail.

[How the Christian doth wrestle
with flesh and blood.]

Second. Observe where he lays the stress of the saint's battle; not in resisting flesh and blood, but principalities and powers; where the apostle excludes not our combat with man, for the war is against the serpent and his seed. As wide as the world is, it cannot peaceably hold the saints and wicked together. But his intent is to show what a complicated enemy, man's wrath and Satan's interwoven, we have to deal with. Observe therefore the conjuncture of the saint's enemies. We have not to do with naked man, but with man led on by Satan; not with flesh and blood, but principalities and powers acting in them. There are two sorts of men the Christian wrestles with, good men and bad. Satan strikes in with both.

1. The Christian wrestles with good men. Many a sharp conflict there hath been betwixt saint and saint, scuffling in the dark through misunderstanding of the truth, and each other; Abraham and Lot at strife. Aaron and Miriam justled with Moses for the wall, till God interposed and ended the quarrel by his immediate stroke on Miriam. The apostles, even in the presence of their Master, were at high words, contesting who should be the greatest. Now in these civil wars among saints, Satan is the great kindle-coal, though little seen, because, like Ahab, he fights in a disguise, playing first on the one side, and on the other, aggravating every petty injury, and thereupon provoking to wrath and revenge; therefore the apostle, dehorting from anger, useth this argument, Give no place to the devil; as if he had said, Fall not out among yourselves, except you long for the devil's company, who is the true soldier of fortune, as the common phrase, living by his sword, and therefore hastes thither where there is any hope of war. Gregory compares the saints in their sad differences to two cocks, which Satan the master of the pit sets on fighting, in hope, when killed, to sup with them at night. Solomon saith, *Prov. 18:6*, the mouth of the contentious man calls for strokes. Indeed we by our mutual strifes give the devil a staff to beat us with; he cannot well work without fire, and therefore blows up these coals of contention, which he useth at his forge,

to heat our spirits into wrath, and then we are malleable, easily hammered as he pleaseth. Contention puts the soul into disorder, and¹¹ [amid arms laws are silent.] The law of grace acts not freely, when the spirit is in a commotion. Meek Moses provoked, speaks unadvisedly. Methinks this, if nothing else will, should sound a retreat to our unhappy differences—that this Joab hath a hand in them—he sets his evil spirit betwixt brethren, and what folly is it for us to bite and devour one another to make hell sport? We are prone to mistake our heat for zeal, whereas commonly in strifes between saints, it is a fire-ship sent in by Satan to break their unity and order; wherein while they stand, they are an Armada invincible, and Satan knows he hath no other way but this shatter to them. When the Christian's language, which should be one, begins to be confounded, they are then near a scattering; it is time for God to part his children when they cannot live in peace together.

2. The Christian wrestles with wicked men. Because you are not of the world, saith Christ, the world hates you. The saint's nature and life are antipodes to the world; fire and water, heaven and hell, may as soon be reconciled as they with it. The heretic is his enemy for truth's sake; the profane for holiness' [sake]; to both the Christian is an abomination, as the Israelite to the Egyptian. Hence come wars; the fire of persecution never goes out in the hearts of the wicked, who say in their hearts as they once with their lips¹², [Christians to the lions.] Now in all the saint's wars with the wicked, Satan is commander-in-chief; it is their father's work they do; his lusts they fulfil. The Sabeans plundered Job, but went on Satan's errand. The heretic broacheth corrupt doctrine, perverts the faith of many, but in that [he is] the minister of Satan, *II Cor. 11:15*; they have their call, their wiles and wages from him. Persecutors [have] their work ascribed to hell. Is it a persecution of the tongue? It is hell sets it on fire. Is it of the hand? Still they are but the devil's instruments, *Rev. 2:10*. The devil shall cast some of you into prison.

Use First. Do you see any driving furiously against the truths or servants of Christ? O pity them,

11. *Inter arma silent leges.* — *Cic. Mil. 4. 10.*

12. *Christiani ad leones.*

as the most miserable wretches in the world; fear not their power, admire not their parts; they are men possessed of, and acted by, the devil; they are his drudges and slaughter-slaves, as the martyr called them. Augustine, in his epistle to Lycinius, one of excellent parts but wicked, who once was his scholar, speaks thus pathetically to him: O how I would weep and mourn over thee, to see such a sparkling wit prostituted to the devil's service! If thou hadst found a golden chalice, thou wouldst have given it to the church; but God hath given thee a golden head, parts and wit, and in this *propinas teipsum diabolo*—thou drinkest thyself to the devil. When you see men of power and parts, using them against God that gave them, weep over them; better they had lived and died, the one slaves, the other fools, than do the devil such service with them.

Use Second. O ye saints, when reproached and persecuted, look farther than man, spend not your wrath upon him. Alas! they are but instruments in the devil's hand. Save your displeasure for Satan, who is thy chief enemy. These may be won to Christ's side, and so become thy friends at last. Now and then we see some running away from the devil's colours, and washing thy wounds with their tears, which they have made with their cruelty. It is a notable passage in Anselm, [in which he] compares the heretic and the persecutor to the horse, and the devil

to the rider. Now, saith he, in battle, when the enemy comes riding up, the valiant soldier 'is¹³ angry not with the horse, but horseman; he labours to kill the man, that he may possess the horse for his use; thus must we do with the wicked, we are not to bend our wrath against them, but [against] Satan that rides them, and spurs them on, labouring by prayer for them as Christ did on the cross, to dismount the devil, that so these miserable souls hackneyed by him may be delivered from him.' It is more honour to take one soul alive out of the devil's clutches, than to leave many slain upon the field. Erasmus said of Augustine, that he begged the lives of those heretics, at the hands of the emperor's officers, who had been bloody persecutors of the orthodox:¹⁴ Like a kind physician he desired their life, that if possible he might work a cure on them, and make them sound in the faith.

13. Non irascitur equo, sed equiti, quantum potest agit ut equitem percutiat, equum possideat; sic contra malos homines agendum, non contra illos, sed illum qui illos instigat, ut dum diabolus vincitur, infelices quos ille possidet liberentur.

14. Cupiebat amicus medicus supresse quos arte sua sanaret.