

DIRECTION ELEVENTH.

THE NECESSARY DUTY OF THE CHRISTIAN, AS CLOTHED IN THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD: OR, HOW THE SPIRITUAL PANOPLY MAY ALONE BE KEPT FURBISHED.

'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints' (Eph. 6:18).

We have at last set before you the Christian in his armour; and now he wants nothing to furnish him for the battle, or enable him for the victory, but the presence of his general to lead him on, and bring him honourably off again by the wisdom of his conduct; which, that he may obtain, the apostle sets him to prayer—'praying always,' &c. As if he had said, 'You have now, Christian, the armour of God; but take heed thou forgettest not to engage God of this armour by humble prayer for your assistance, lest for all this you be worsted in the fight. He that gives you the arms, can only teach you to use them, and enable you to overcome by their use.' I am not ignorant that some make this of 'prayer,' a piece of armour, and to be reckoned as a part of the panoply. The truth is, it matters not much in what notion we handle it, whether as a distinct piece of armour, or as a duty and means necessarily required to the use of our armour. The latter I shall follow; partly because it hath no piece of material armour, as the other all have, allotted to it for a resemblance; as also, because by the connection it hath, not with the last preceding words only, but with the whole discourse of the armour, it seems to be superadded as a general duty influential upon all the pieces forenamed; and may be read with every piece:—Take the girdle of truth, praying with all prayer, &c.; having on the breastplate of righteousness, praying with all prayer, &c., and the same of the rest. The Christian's armour will rust except it be furbished and scoured with the oil of prayer. What the key is to the watch, that [is] prayer to our graces—it winds them up and sets them agoing. In the words observe,

FIRST. The duty commanded, 'prayer,' with the end for which it is appointed, viz. as a help to all his graces and means to carry on his war against sin and Satan: προσευχόμενοι—'praying.'

SECOND. A directory for prayer; wherein we are instructed how to perform this duty in six distinct divisions of the subject. FIRST. The time for prayer—'praying always.' SECOND. The kinds and sorts of prayer—'with all prayer and supplication.' THIRD. The inward principle of prayer from which it must flow—'in the Spirit.' FOURTH. The guard to be set about the duty of prayer—'watching thereunto.' FIFTH. The unwearied constancy to be exercised in the duty—'with all perseverance.' SIXTH. The comprehensiveness of the duty, or persons for whom we are to pray—'for all saints.'

DIRECTION XI.—FIRST GENERAL PART.

[THE DUTY COMMANDED, AND ITS CONNECTION WITH THE WHOLE DISCOURSE.]

‘Praying’ (Eph. 6:18).

We begin with the first, the duty in general, together with the connection it hath with the whole preceding discourse of the armour, implied in the participle πρόσευχόμενοι—‘praying.’ That is, furnish yourselves with the armour of God, and join prayer to all these graces for you defence against your spiritual enemies. Let us take the three following branches of the subject. FIRST. Prayer as a necessary duty to the Christian. SECOND. Why it is so necessary a means, with our other armour, for our defence. THIRD. Satan’s designs against prayer.

So that the point deducible from this is—

BRANCH FIRST.

[Prayer A NECESSARY DUTY to the Christian
in his spiritual warfare.]

We lay down as the point deducible from what we have said the following doctrine.

DOCTRINE. That prayer is a necessary duty to be performed by the Christian, and used with all other means in his spiritual warfare. This is the ‘silver trumpet,’ by the sound of which he is to alarm heaven, and call in God to his succour, Num. 10:9. The saints’ enemies fall till God riseth; and God stays to be raised by their prayers. ‘Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered,’ Ps. 68:1. Prayer, it is a catholic duty, and means to be made use of in all our affairs and enterprises. What bread and salt are to our table, that prayer is to the Christian in all his undertakings, enjoyments, and temptations. Whatever our meal is, bread and salt are set on the board; and whatever our condition is, prayer must not be forgot. As we dip all our morsels in salt, and eat them with bread; so we are to act every grace, season every enjoyment, mingle every duty, and oppose every temptation, with prayer. It hath been the constant practice of the saints in all their dangers and straits, whether from enemies within or without, from sin, devils, or men, to betake themselves to the throne of grace, and draw a line of prayer about them; accounting this the only safe posture to stand in for their defence. When God called Abraham from Haran into a strange country, where he wandered from place to place amidst strangers, who could not but have him in some suspicion—con-

sidering the train and retinue he had—and this their suspicion create many dangers to this holy man from the kings round about, it is observable what course Abraham takes for his defence. You shall find in his removes from place to place, the memorable thing recorded of him is, that ‘he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord,’ Gen. 12:7, 8; 13:3, 4. This was the breastwork he raised and entrenched himself in. When he had once by prayer cast himself into the arms of God for protection, then he made account that he was in his castle. But what need Abraham have put himself so often to this trouble? Had he not the security of God’s promise when he set forth, that God would bless them that blessed him, and curse them that cursed him? And had he not faith to believe God would be a God of his word to perform what he had promised? We confess both. But neither God’s promise, nor Abraham’s faith thereon, gave any supersedeas¹ to his duty in prayer. The promise is given as a ground of faith, and faith as an encouraging help in prayer; but neither [are] intended to discharge us of our duty, and save us the labour of that work.

And what Abraham did, the same have all the saints ever done. The great spoils which they ever got from their enemies was in the field of prayer. If Moses sent Joshua into the valley against Amalek, himself will be on the mount to storm heaven by his

1. Supersedeas, — a legal document issued to halt or delay the action of some process of law. Webster’s.

— SDB

prayer, while he is engaged in fight with the enemy below; and the victory it is plain was not got by Joshua's sword, so much as Moses' prayer. Jehoshaphat, when he had near a million of men mustered for the field, besides his garrisons that were all well appointed, yet we find him as hard at prayer as if he had not had a man on his side: 'We know not what to do, but our eyes upon thee,' II Chr. 20:12. Now if these worthies when they had but flesh and blood—men like themselves—to contest with, did yet fetch in their help from heaven, and make such use of prayer's auxiliary force—and that when other helps were not wanting—lest they should be found under the neglect of an indispensable duty and prevalent means in order to their defence, how much more doth it behove the Christian, both in point of duty and prudence, to take the same course in his spiritual war against principalities and powers! For the saint's graces, when best trained and exercised, are, without prayer, far less able to stand against Satan than they, with their military preparation, were to repel the force of men like themselves. 'Watch and pray,' saith our Saviour, 'that ye enter not into temptation,' Matt. 26:41. The not keeping this pass gave the enemy Satan a fair occasion to come in upon them. For we see, not taking Christ's counsel, they were all, though holy men, shamefully foiled. Most of them shifted for themselves by a cowardly flight, while they left their Lord in his enemy's hands. And he that thought to show more courage than his fellows, at last came off with deeper guilt and shame than them all, by denying his Master, who was even then owning him in the face of death, yea his Father's wrath. And it is observable that, as they were led into temptation through their own neglect of prayer, so they were rescued and led out of it again by Christ's prayer, which he mercifully laid in beforehand for them. 'I have prayed ...that thy faith fail not,' Luke 22:32.

But that which above all commends this duty to us, is Christ's own practice; who, besides his constant exercise in it, did, upon any great undertaking wherein he was to meet opposition from Satan and his instruments, much more abound in it. At his baptism, being now to enter the stage of his public ministry, and to make his way thereunto through the fierce and furious assaults of Satan—with whom he was to grapple as it were hand to hand after his forty days' soli-

tude—we find him at prayer, Luke 3:21. Which prayer had a present answer, heaven opening, and the Spirit descending on him, with this voice, saying, 'Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased,' ver. 22. And now Christ marcheth forth undauntedly to meet his enemy, who waited for him in the wilderness. Again, when he intended to commission his apostles, and send them forth to preach the gospel—which he knew would bring the lion fell and mad out of his den, as also derive the world's wrath upon those his messengers—he first sets his disciples on praying, Matt. 9:38, and then spends the whole night himself in the same work before their mission, Luke 6:12. But above all, when he was to fight his last battle with the prince of this world, and also conflict with the wrath of his Father, now armed against him, and ready to be poured upon him for man's sin—whose cause he had espoused—on the success of which great undertaking depended the saving or losing his mediatory kingdom, O how then did he bestir himself in prayer! It is said, 'He prayed more earnestly.' As a wrestler that strains every vein in his body, so he put forth his whole might, 'with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard,' Heb. 5:7, so that he won the field, though himself slain upon the place. The spoils of this glorious victory believers do now divide, and shall enjoy it to all eternity. And what is the English of all this, but to show us both the necessity and prevalency of prayer? Without this, no victory to be had, though we have our armour; but this, with that, will make us conquerors over all.

BRANCH SECOND.

[WHY prayer is necessary to the Christian
in his spiritual warfare.]

Now, to proceed and show why prayer is so necessary a means with our other armour for our defence, let us set forth these reasons in order. FIRST. Because of the co-ordination of this duty with all other means for the Christian's defence, and that by divine appointment. SECOND. Because of the influence that prayer hath upon all our graces. THIRD. Because of the great prevalency prayer hath with God.

[THE CO-ORDINATION OF PRAYER with other means for the Christian's defence makes it necessary.]

REASON FIRST. The first reason is taken from the co-ordination of this duty of prayer with all other means for the Christian's defence, and that by divine appointment. He that bids us take the girdle of truth, breastplate of righteousness, &c., commands also not to neglect this duty. Now what God joins we must not sever. The efficacy of co-ordinate means lies in their conjunction. The force of an army consists not in this troop, or that one regiment, but in all the parts in a body. And if any single troop or company shall presume to fight the enemy alone, what can they expect but to be routed by the enemy and punished by their general also? Let not any say they use this means and that. If any one duty be willingly neglected, the golden chain of obedience is broke. And bonum non nisi ex integris—nothing is really good that is not so in all its parts. As to a good action, there is required a concurrence of all the several ingredients and causes; so to make a good Christian, there is required a conscientious care to use all appointed means. He must follow the Lord 'fully;' not make here a balk and there a furrow. It is not the least of Satan's policy to get between one duty and another, that the man may not unite his forces, and be uniform in his endeavour.

Few so bad as to use no means; and not many so faithful to God and themselves as conscientiously to use all. One, he pretends to sincerity, and dares appeal to God that he means well, and his heart is good. But, for 'the breastplate of righteousness,' it is too heavy and cumbersome for him to wear. Another seems very just and righteous, so that he would not wrong his neighbour, no, not of one penny, to gain many pounds. But, as for faith in Christ, this he never looks after. A third boasts of his faith and hope, as if he did not doubt of his salvation. But, as for the word of God that should beget and increase it, he cares not how seldom he looks on it at home, or hears it in the public. And a fourth, he hath this to say for himself, 'That he is a constant hearer, his seat at church is seldom found empty, and at home the Bible often in his hands.' But, as for prayer, his closet, could it speak, would bear witness against him, that he seldom or never performs it. This half doing

will prove many a soul's whole undoing. Samuel asked Jesse, 'Are here all thy children?' Though but a stripling wanting, he must be sent for before he will sit down. So may I say to many that are very busy and forward in some particular duties and means, 'Is here all that God hath given thee in charge?' If but one be wanting, God's blessing will be wanting also. And as that son was wanting of Jesse's which God did intend to set the crown upon, so that duty and means which is most neglected, we have cause to think is the means which God would especially crown with his blessing upon our faithful endeavour.

[THE INFLUENCE OF PRAYER upon Christian graces makes it a necessary duty.]

REASON SECOND. The second reason is taken from the influence that prayer hath upon all our graces. And that in a double respect. It will help to evidence the truth of grace, and also advance its growth.

First. The duty of prayer, frequently and spiritually performed, will be a means to evidence the truth of our graces. And this is of no small importance to the Christian, when he hath to do with the tempter. For that which he mainly drives at, is to bring the Christian into a suspicion of himself as to the work of grace in him, thereby to overturn the very foundation of his hope, and put him to a stand in his endeavours. He, indeed, will have little list to go on that fears he is not in his right way. I have heard that politicians can make use of a state lie—though the credit of it lasts but a little while—for great advantage to their designs. And he that learns them this art makes much more use of it himself to further his designs against the Christian. Because he could not keep Christ in the grave, therefore he raiseth a lie, to hinder the belief of his resurrection in the world. And when he cannot hinder the production of grace, he misreports the work of the Christian, as if all were but a cheat put upon him by his own deceitful heart; which the poor creature is prone enough, God knows, to believe. And so, though the fear be false and groundless; yet, being believed, [it] produceth as sad a confusion to his thoughts, and distress to his spirit, as if it were true. Jacob could not have mourned more if Joseph had indeed been slain, than he did

when there was no such matter. Nor could a wicked wretch easily endure more terror and horror than some precious saints have felt, for the time that Satan's false report—slanderizing the truth of their grace—hath found credit with them. Now, in prayer, the Christian stands at great advantage to find out the truth of his state, and that upon a double account.

1. God doth commonly take this season, when his people are pouring out their souls to him, to open his heart to them, and to give his testimony both to their persons and graces. God hath his sealing hours, in which his Spirit comes and bears witness to his children's state and grace. And this of prayer is a principal one. Where was it that God so marvellously dignified, and if I may so say, knighted Jacob with that new title of honour, 'Thou shalt be called Israel,' but in the field of prayer? What was the happy hour in which the angel knocked at Daniel's door to let him know how God loved him? was it not when he was knocking at heaven door by his prayer? 'At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved,' Dan. 9:23. When got the woman of Canaan the sight of her faith, not only that it was true, but also strong—'O woman, great is thy faith!' but when her heart was carried forth so vehemently in prayer? Yea, Christ himself heard that miraculous voice from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son,' when he was lifting up his eyes in prayer to heaven, Luke 3:21.

2. The duty of prayer affords a demonstrative argument for the truth of that soul's grace which spiritually performs it. The Spirit of God, when he testifies to the truth of a saint's grace, useth to join issue with the saint's own spirit, 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit,' Rom. 8:16. Now the testimony which the Christian's own spirit gives for him, is taken from those vital acts of the new creature that operate in him—such as sincerity, godly sorrow for sin, love of holiness, and other of this nature are. Now, no way do these and other graces more sensibly discover themselves to the Christian's view than in prayer. Here sincerity shows itself in the Christians' plain-heartedness to confess all his sins freely, without extorting, and nakedly, without extenuation or reservation—when there is no false box in the cabinet of the soul to lock up a darling sin in. Holy David, Ps. 32, having, ver. 1, pronounced him 'blessed' that had

no sin imputed to him, and, 'in whose spirit there is no guile,' gives ver. 5, this instance of his own sincerity, that he 'acknowledged his sin, and did not hide his iniquity;' as also how well he sped thereby, 'And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.' Again, here [i.e. in prayer] doth the Christian give vent to his heart, aching with inward grief for sin. Prayer is the channel into which godly sorrow pours forth itself, and runs down in brinish tears, while the Christian is accusing himself of, and judging himself for, his abominations, with deep shame and self-abhorrence. In a word, here the soul's love to holiness flames forth in his fervent vehement desires and requests for grace that can bear no denial, but even breaks for the longing it hath to it.

Thus we see spirit of prayer is both an argument of true grace, and a means to draw out that true grace into act, whereby its truth may be the better exposed to view. A 'spirit of grace and of supplications' are both joined together, Zech. 12:10. The latter doth indicate the former. What is prayer but the breathing forth of that grace which is breathed into the soul by the Holy Spirit? When God breathed into man the breath of life, he became a living soul. So, when God breathes into the creature the breath of spiritual life, it becomes a praying soul. 'Behold he prayeth,' saith God of Paul to Ananias, Acts 9:11. As if he had said, 'Be not afraid of him; he is an honest soul; thou mayest trust him for he prays.' Praying is the same to the new creature as crying is to the natural. The child is not learned by art or example to cry, but instructed by nature; it comes into the world crying. Praying is not a lesson got by forms and rules of art, but flowing from principles of new life itself.

Second. The duty of prayer, as it is a means to evidence, so to increase, grace. The praying Christian is the thriving Christian; whereas he that is infrequent or slothful in praying, is a waster. He is like one that lives at great expense, and drives little or no trade to bring wherewithal to maintain it. Now prayer helps toward the increase and growth of grace in these two ways:—1. As it draws the habits of grace into act, and exerciseth them. 2. As it sets the soul nigh to God.

1. As it draws the habits of grace into act, and exerciseth them. Now as exercise brings a double benefit to the body, so this to the soul.

(1.) Exercise doth help to digest or breathe forth

those humours that clog the spirits. One that stirs little, we see, grows pursy, and is soon choked up with phlegm, which exercise clears the body of. Prayer is the saint's exercise-field, where his graces are breathed. It is as the wind to the air to sweep the soul; as bellows to the fire, which clears the coals of those ashes that smother them. The Christian, while in this world, lives but in an unwholesome climate. One while the delights of it deaden and dull his love to Christ; another while, the troubles he meets in it damp his faith on the promise. How now should the poor Christian get out of these his distempers, had he not a throne of grace to resort to, where, if once his soul be in a melting frame, he, like one laid in a kingly sweat, soon breathes out the malignity of his disease, and comes into his right temper again. How oft do we find the holy prophet, when he first kneels down to pray, full of fears and doubts, who yet before he and the duty part, grows into a sweet familiarity with God and repose in his own spirit? He begins his prayer, as if it were come to that pass that he thought that God would never give him a kind look more: 'How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever?' Ps. 13:1. But by that time he hath exercised himself a little in duty, his distemper wears off, the mists scatter, and his faith breaks out as the sun in its strength. 'I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation, I will sing unto the Lord,' ver. 5. Thus his faith lays the cloth, expecting a feast ere long to be set on. He that even now questioned whether he should ever hear good news from heaven, is so strong in faith, as to make himself merry with the hopes of that mercy which he is assured will come at last. Abraham began with fifty, but his faith got ground on God every step, till he brought down the price of their lives to ten.

(2.) Exercise whets the appetite to that food which must be taken before strength can be got. And *causa causæ est causa causati*—the remoter cause of an immediate one is, in a certain sense, the cause of that which flows as an effect from the more immediate. The hone that sets the edge on the husbandman's scythe, helps him to mow the grass. None comes so sharp-set to the word—which is the saint's food to strengthen his grace—as the Christian that takes prayer in his way to the ordinance. The stronger natural heat is, the better stomach the man

hath to his meat. Love in the soul is what natural heat is in the body. The more the soul loves the word, the more craving it has after it. Now, as exercise stirs up the natural heat of the body, so prayer excites this spiritual heat of love in the saint's bosom to the word. Cornelius is an excellent instance for it. We find him hard at prayer in his house, when behold a vision that bids him send for Peter, who should preach the gospel to him—a happy reward for his devotion! Now, see what a sharp appetite this praying soul hath to the word. He upon this presently posts away messengers for Peter, and before he comes, gathers an assembly together—no doubt all of his friends that he could get. There he sits with a longing heart waiting for the preacher. As soon as ever he sees his face, he falls down at his feet, receiving him with that reverence and respect as if he had been an angel dropped out of heaven. Presently he sets Peter to work, though some may think he passed good manners in putting him to labour after so long a journey, before he had refreshed him with some collation or other; but the good man was so hungry to hear the message he brought, that he could not well pacify his soul to stay any longer, and like a man truly hunger-bit, he is ready to catch at any truth—though never so bitter—which shall be set before him. 'Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God,' Acts 10:33. And when the sermon is done, so savoury and sweet was the meal, that he is loath to think of parting with Peter before he gets more from him; and therefore beseeches him to stay some days with him. One sermon did but make his teeth water for another. O how unlike are they who come reeking out of the world to a sermon, to Cornelius that riseth from prayer to wait for the preacher?

2. Prayer helps our graces, as it sets the soul nigh to God. In prayer we are said to 'draw nigh to God,' James 4:8—to 'come before his presence,' Ps. 95:2. In it we have 'access by one spirit unto the Father,' Eph. 2:18, as one that brings a petition to a prince is called into his presence-chamber—one of the nearest approaches to God which the creature is capable of on this side heaven, which was signified by the incense altar, that stood so high even within the vail. Prayer, it is called, 'The throne of grace.' We come in prayer to the throne of God, and put our petition into

the very hand of God, as he sits on his throne in all his royalty. Now, as prayer is so near an approach to God, it hath a double influence into the growth of the saint's grace.

(1.) By this near access to God, the soul is put the more into a holy awe and fear of that pure and piercing eye of God which he sees looking on him. It is true, God is ever near us. Pray or not pray, we cannot rid ourselves of his presence. But never hath the soul such apprehensions of his presence as when it is set before God in prayer. Now the soul speaks to God as it were mouth to mouth; and considering how holy that majesty is with whom he hath to do in prayer, he must needs reverence and tremble before him. Now the natural issue of this holy fear, what can it be but a care to approve itself to God? And this care cherishes every grace. They are carried in its arms, as the child in its nurse's. It keeps the girdle of truth buckled close about his loins. 'O,' saith the soul, 'I must either leave praying, or leave doubling and juggling with God by hypocrisy!' It will strengthen the breast-plate of holiness. It is not possible that a Christian should walk loosely all day, and be free and familiar with God at night. He that waits on the person of a prince will be careful to carry nothing about him that should be offensive to his eye; yea, afraid lest anything should come to his ear, that should bring him under a cloud in his prince's thoughts, and remove him from his place about him. And courtiers have those that will be always undermining then if they can; and the Christian wants not such an adversary—for Satan is at his right hand at every miscarriage to accuse him unto God, saying, 'This is your favourite. Though he be so devout in prayer, he can do this or that, when the duty is over.' And therefore, if any in the world have a tie upon them more than others to walk exactly, it is they that minister before the Lord in this duty. Princes are more curious of their attendants than of others at further distance from them. When David showed some distraction of mind before king Achish, he bids away with him. 'Have I need of madmen, that ye have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence?' And does a poor mortal man that sits on a throne of dust, only heaped up and raised a little above his fellows, take such state on him as not to bear the discomposure of any before him? How much less will the great God—though we

wink for a time at the foul sins of others—brook any unholy behaviour in those that wait so nigh upon him! This, no doubt, made Cain run so fast from the presence of God, because he knew that it was no standing so nigh God with such an unholy heart as he carried in his bosom.

(2.) By the soul's near access to God in prayer, it receives sweet influences of grace from him. All grace comes from the God of grace; not only the first seed of grace, but its growth and increment; and God usually sheds forth his grace in a way of communion with his people. Now, by prayer the Christian is led into most intimate communion with God. And from communion follows communication. As the warmth the chicken finds by sitting under the hen's wings cherisheth it, so are the saints' graces enlivened and strengthened by the sweet influences they receive from this close communion with God. The Christian is compared to a tree, Ps. 1. And those trees flourish most, and bear sweetest fruit, which stand most in the sun. The praying Christian is, as they say of the Rhodians, in sole positus—placed in the sun. He stands nigh to God, and hath, God nigh to him in all that he calls upon him for. And therefore you may expect his fruit to be sweet and ripe, when another stands as it were in the shade, and at a distance from God (through neglect of, or infrequency in, this duty), will have little fruit found on his branches, and that but green and sour. 'Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing,' Ps. 92:13, 14.

[THE PREVALENCY OF PRAYER with God makes it a necessary duty.]

REASON THIRD. The third reason the Christian should join prayer to all other means, is taken from the great prevalency prayer hath with God. He will do no great matter for a saint without prayer, and nothing is too great for him to do at his request. Prayer, like Jonathan's bow, when duly qualified as to the person and act, never returns empty. Never was faithful prayer lost at sea. No merchant trades with such certainty as the praying saint. Some prayers indeed have a longer voyage than others; but then they come with the richer lading at last into the port. In

trading, he gets most by his commodity that can forbear his money longest. So does the Christian that can with most patience stay for a return of his prayer. Such a soul shall never be ashamed of his waiting. The promise is an assuring office to secure him his adventure, I John 3:22. O who can express the powerful oratory of a believer's prayer! Vacula Pater formaliter dicta in corde, est eloquentia, quam Demosthenes, Cicero, et eloquentissimi in mundo nunquam possunt exprimere (Luther)—this little word Father, lisped forth in prayer by a child of God, exceeds the eloquence of Demosthenes, Cicero, and all other so famed orators in the world.

We read of taking heaven 'by force,' Matt. 11:12. If ever this may be said to be done it is in prayer. Cælum tundimus et misericordiam extorquemus, saith Tertullian—we knock at heaven, and the merciful heart of God flies open, which we bring away with us. And in the same apology he speaks of Christians, how they went to pray, as an enemy doth to besiege a town, and take it by storm—coimus in coetum et congregationem, ut ad Deum quasi manufactuâ præcationibus ambiamus orantes. And then he adds, hæc vis Deo grata est—this holy violence we offer to God in prayer is very pleasing to him. Surely, if it were not, he would neither help the Christian so in the work, nor reward him for it when it is done. Whereas he doth both. He helped Jacob to overcome: 'By his strength he had power with God,' Hosea 12:3. That is, not by his own, but by the strength he had from God. And then he puts honour upon him for the victory, 'Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed,' Gen. 32:28. It were easy here to expatiate into a large history of the great exploits which prayer is renowned for in holy writ. James 5:17; Isa. 37; Dan 2:18; II Sam. 15:31; Est. 4:16; Acts 12:5; John 11:41; Jonah 2:2; Joshua 10:12, 14; II Kings 20:10; Ps. 106:23; Eze. 22:30. This is the key that hath opened and again shut heaven. It hath vanquished mighty armies, and unlocked such secrets as passed the skill of the very devil himself to find out. It hath strangled desperate plots in the very womb wherein they were conceived, and made those engines of cruelty prepared against the saints recoil upon the inventors of them; so that they have inherited the gallows which they did set up for others. At the

knock of prayer, prison doors have opened, the grave hath delivered up its dead; and the sea's Leviathan, not able to digest his prey, hath been made to vomit it up again. It hath stopped the sun's chariot in the heavens, yea made it go back. And that which surpasseth all, it hath taken hold of the Almighty, when on his full march against persons and people, and hath put him into a merciful retreat. Indeed, by the power of prayer hath with God, it comes to prevail over all the rest.

He that hath a key to God's heart cannot be shut out, or stopped at the creature's door. Now prayer moves God and overcomes him, not by causing any change in the divine will, and making God to take up new thoughts of doing that for his people which he did not before intend. No, God is immutable, and what good he doth in time for his people he purposed before any time was. But prayer is said to move than overcome God; because he then gives, what from eternity he purposed to give upon their praying to him. For when God decreed what he would do for his saints, he also purposed that they should pray for the same. 'I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them,' Eze. 36:37. Prayer's midwifery shall be used to deliver the mercies God purposeth and promiseth. Hezekiah understood this when he calls the prophet to the church's labour, and bids because 'the children'—that is, deliverance—stuck in her birth, that he should therefore 'lift up a prayer,' Isa. 37:3, 4. And when Daniel had found the full reckoning of the promise—how long it had to go with the deliverance promised for their return from captivity—perceiving it hastened, he therefore falls hard to prayer, knowing God's purpose to give doth not discharge us from our duty to 'ask,' Dan. 9:3.

[Why Christians are to pray for what God hath purposed and promised to give.]

Question. But why doth God impose this upon the saints, that they should pray for what he hath purposed and promised to give? First. That they may be conformable to Christ. Second. That he may give the good things of the promise with safety to his honour. Third. To show the great delight he takes in his saints' prayers.

Answer First. That they may be conformable to

Christ. The design of God is to make every saint like Christ. This was resolved from eternity Rom. 8:29. Now, as the limner looks on the person whose picture he would take, and draws his lines to answer him with the nearest similitude that may be; so doth God look on Christ as the archetype to which he will conform the saint, in suffering, in grace, and in glory: yet so that Christ hath the pre-eminence in all. Every saint must suffer because Christ suffered: Christ must not have a delicate body under a crucified head. Yet never any suffered, or could, what he endured. Christ is holy, and therefore shall every saint be, but in an inferior degree. An image cut in clay cannot be so exact as that which is engraved on gold. Now, as in other things, so in this our conformity to Christ appears—that as the promises made to him were performed on his prayer to his Father, so promises made to his saints are given to them in the same way of prayer. ‘Ask of me,’ saith God to his Son, ‘and I shall give thee,’ Ps. 2:8. And the apostle tells us, ‘Ye have not because ye ask not.’ God had promised support to Christ in all his conflicts: ‘Behold my servant, whom I uphold,’ Isa. 42:1. Yet he prays ‘with strong crying and tears,’ when his feet stood within the shadow of death. A seed is promised to him, and victory over his enemies; yet, for both these, he is at prayer now in heaven. Christ towards us acts as a king, but towards his Father as a priest. All he speaks to God is on his knee by prayer and intercession. In like manner the saints. The promise makes them kings over their lusts, conquerors over their enemies; but it makes them priests towards God, by prayer humbly to sue out those great things given in the promise.

Answer Second. That God may give the good things of the promise with safety to his honour. Secure God but his glory, and the saint may have what he will. The very life of God is bound up in his glory. The creature’s honour is not intrinsical to his being. A prince is a man when his crown and kingdom are gone. But God cannot be a God, except he be glorious; neither can he be glorious, unless he be holy, just, merciful, and faithful, &c. Now, that this his glory may be seen and displayed, is the great end he propounds both in making and ordering of the world: ‘The Lord hath made all things for himself,’ Prov. 16:4. If there were any one occurrence in the

world which could no way be reducible to the glory of God, it would make the being of a deity to be questioned. But the all-wise God hath so made, and doth so order, all his creatures with their actions, that the manifestation of his glory is the result of all. Indeed, he forceth it from some, and takes it by distress, as princes do their taxes from disobedient subjects. Thus the very wrath of his enemies shall praise him, Ps. 76:10. But he expects the saints should be active instruments to glorify him, and, like loyal loving subjects, pay him the tribute of his praise freely, with acclamations of joy and gratitude; which, that they may do, he issueth out his mercies in such a way as may best suit with this their duty. And that is to give the good things he hath purposed and promised to them upon their humble address in prayer to him. Now two ways the glory of God is secured by this means.

1. The saint, in the very duty of prayer—when he performs it in a qualified manner—doth highly glorify God. Prayer, as it is medium gratiæ—a channel of grace, for the conveying and deriving blessings from God, the fountain, into the cistern of our bosoms; so it is medium cultus—a means of worship, whereby we are to do homage to God, and give him the glory of his deity. By this we give him ‘the glory of his power.’ Prayer is a humble appeal from our impotency to God’s omnipotence. None begs that at another’s door which he can pleasure himself with at home. And if we thought not God able, we would go to another, not to him. We give him the glory of his sovereignty and dominion and acknowledge that he is not only able to procure for us what we ask, but can give us a right to, and the blessing of, what he gives. Therefore Christ closeth his prayer with, ‘Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,’ &c., as a reason why we direct our prayers to God; because he alone is the sovereign Lord that can invest us in, and give us title to, any enjoyment. So that it is high treason against the crown and dignity of God, when we either attempt to possess ourselves of any enjoyments without praying to him; or when we pray religiously to any other besides him. By the first we usurp his sovereignty ourselves, in their language, ‘We are lords; we will come no more unto thee,’ Jer. 2:31. And by the second we give away his kingdom and sovereignty to another. This was the devil’s drift when he would

have had Christ fall down and worship him, that thereby he might acknowledge him to have the rule of the world. Again, by prayer give him the glory of his free mercy. Men demand a debt, but beg an alms. When we pray we renounce merit. See them opposed, 'Whom, though I were righteous, yet would I not answer, but I would make supplication to my judge,' Job 9:15. We might show the same in all the other attributes. But this taste from a few may suffice. And as God, essentially considered, receives by prayer an acknowledgement of his deity; so every person in the sacred Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in prayer are honoured. By directing our prayers to God the Father, we honour him as the source and fountain of all grace and mercy. We honour the Son in presenting our prayers in his name to the Father, thereby acknowledging him the purchaser of the mercies we beg. And the Holy Ghost, he receives the honour of that assistance which we acknowledge to receive from him for the duty of prayer. For as we pray to the Father through the Son, so by the help of the Spirit.

2. As God is honoured in the very act and exercise of his duty duly qualified, so by it the Christian is deeply engaged, and also sweetly disposed, to praise God for, and glorify him with, the mercies he obtains by prayer.

(1.) Prayer engageth to praise God because of his mercies. In prayer we do not only beg mercy of God, but vow praise to God for the mercies we beg. Prayers are called 'vows,' 'Thou, O God, hast heard my vows,' Ps. 61:5; that is, my prayers, in which I solemnly vowed praise for the deliverance I begged. It is no prayer where no vow is included. We must not think to bind God and leave ourselves free. God ties himself in the promise to help us; but the condition of the obligation on our part, is, that we will glorify him. And upon no other terms doth God give us leave to ask any mercy at his hands. 'Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me,' Ps. 50:15. Now, what a strong tie doth this lay upon the praying Christian's heart, to use the mercies he receives holily, and to wear with thankfulness what he wins by prayer! The Christian who would be loath to be taken in a lie to man, will much more fear to be found a liar to God. 'Surely they are my people,' saith God; 'children that will not lie; so he was their

Saviour,' Isa. 63:8.

(2.) Prayer is a means to dispose the heart to praise. Prayer and praise, like the symbolical qualities in the elements, are soon resolved each into the other. When David begins a psalm with prayer, he commonly ends it with praise. From whence things have their original, thither they return. From the sea the riverwater comes, and no mountains can hinder, but back again to the sea it will go. That spirit which leads the soul out of itself to God for supply, will direct it to the same God with his praise. We do not use to borrow money of one man and pay it to another. If God hath been thy 'strength,' surely thou wilt make him thy 'song.' The thief comes not to thank a man for what he steals out of his yard. And I as little wonder that they do not glorify God for or with his mercies, who did not ask his leave by prayer for them. What men do by themselves they ascribe to themselves. Mercies ill got are commonly as ill spent: because they are not sanctified to them, and so become fuel to feed their lusts. Hence it is, the more enjoyments they have the more proud and unthankful they are. But by prayer the Christian's enjoyments are sanctified, and the flatulency of them, which puffs up others into pride, is corrected; and the same mercies received by prayer, become nourishment to the saints' graces, that putrefy and turn to noisome lusts in the prayerless sinner.

Answer Third. God will have his people pray for what he hath purposed and promised, to show the great delight he takes in their prayers. As a father, though he can send to his son who lives abroad the money he hath promised for his maintenance, yet let him not have it except he comes over at set times for it. And why? Not to trouble his son, but delight himself in his son's company. God takes such content in the company of his praying saints, that to prevent all strangeness on their part, he orders it so that they cannot neglect a duty but they shall lose something by it. 'Ye have not, because ye ask not.' And the more they abound in prayer the more they shall with blessings. The oftener Joash had 'smote upon the ground,' the fuller his victory over Syria had been. As the arrows of prayer are that we shoot to heaven, so will the returns of mercy from thence be. Yet must it not be imputed to any loathness in God to give, that he makes them pray often and long before the mercy

comes, but rather to the content he takes in our prayers. He doth all this on a design to draw out the graces of his Spirit in his children, the voice and language of which in prayer makes most sweet melody in the ear of God. The truth is, we are in this too like musicians playing under our window; they play while the money is thrown out to them, and then their pipes are put up. And were our wants so supplied by the answer of one prayer, that we did not suddenly need a new recruit, we would be gone, and God should not hear of us in haste.

USE OR APPLICATION.

[Reproof to prayerless souls,
with the dismal state of such.]

Use First. A word to those who live in the total neglect of this duty, that are prayerless creatures. Such ruins of mankind there are to be found, who pass their wretched days like so many swine; they never look up to heaven till God lays them on their back; nor are heard to cry in prayer till this knife is at their throat. What shall I say to these giants and sons of the earth, that have renounced their allegiance to the God of heaven!—these kine of Bashan, who, like so many metamorphosed Nebuchadnezzars, have lost the heart of a man, and live like as very brutes, as the beasts themselves, who, while they feed, take no notice of him that clothes the field with grass for them! Can I hope they will hear man who will not acknowledge the God of heaven by praying to him? Surely your case is deplored. What! not pray? Can you do less than by this homage to own God for your Maker? O less for your own souls, than to beg their life of God, whose hand of justice is lift up against you? Are you resolved thus to throw yourselves into the devil's mouth, without so much as striking one stroke for your defence? If God had required a greater matter at your hands than this, the salvation of your souls would have deserved it. And will you stick at this?

God does not put us to the cost of laying down the price of our ransom; no, not so much as to pay our prison fees. Only, he bids thee pray, and he will pay: 'Your heart shall live that seek God,' Ps. 69:32. O,

what salt and vinegar will this pour into thy wounds, when in hell thy conscience shall fly in thy face, and tell thee thou hadst not been there if thou wouldst in time have humbled thy soul before God, and sought his favour in that way which cost Christ his blood to procure. Either thou must be dispossessed of this dumb devil, or undoubtedly it will be thy damnation! And who dies with less pity than that malefactor that stouts it before the judge, and will not so much as down on his knees, or open his mouth to cry for mercy, though the judge on purpose stays to pronounce the sentence and break up the court, to see whether his stomach will fall, and his proud spirit stoop to ask his life at his hands? You know how angry Pilate was when Christ was silent: 'Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?' John 19:10, though, alas! poor creature, as Christ told him, he could do nothing for or against him; and therefore Christ neither feared him, nor ought him so much service as to bestow a word upon him. The warrant for Christ's death was sealed in heaven, and he, with the rest of Christ's enraged enemies, were but God's servants to do the execution according to the determinate counsel of God. But how much more reason hath the great God to be provoked by this irreligion, and say, 'Wilt thou not speak to me? pray to me? Dost thou not know I have the power to save or damn? to deliver thee to the tormentor, or keep thee out of his hands?' Or, dost thou look that God is bound to save thee whether pray or not pray? If he doth, I promise you he shall do more for thee than for others; yea, than for his own Son, who made strong cries and supplications to be saved by him. God hath laid the method of salvation and think not that he will alter it, and so make a blot in the counsel of his will, for thy pleasure. What he hath written he hath written, and it shall not be reversed. Yea, though others should be so kind as out of pity to thy soul to pray for thee, yet if thou beest thyself a prayerless creature, thou shalt die the death. If they were Noah, Samuel, and Daniel, that stood up to beg thy life they should not be heard for thee. Proxy prayers in this case will not prevail. And therefore, when the Israelites came a begging to Samuel for his prayers—which, good man, he easily promised; indeed, durst not have forgot them in that, though they had not remembered him

of it—mark what caveat he annexeth, ‘Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart,’ I Sam. 12:24. As if he had said, ‘Do not set me to do for you {that} which you will not do for yourselves.’ It is not all the interest my prayers have in heaven {that} will keep the wrath of God from falling on you, if you be wicked and atheistical; therefore ‘fear the Lord, and serve him.’ That is, pray and obey him.

Fear oft denotes the worship of God, Gen. 31:53. God is called ‘the fear of Isaac;’ i.e. the God whom he feared and worshipped. So, ‘Who would not fear thee, O King of nations?’ Jer. 10:7, that is, worship thee, rather than the stocks and stones; because the worshipping of God results from our reverence and fear we have of him. Christ ‘was heard in that he feared him,’ Heb. 5:7—ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας; that is, his religious fear, expressed in those his strong cries which he groaned forth to God in his agony. And therefore, so long as you are prayerless, you live without the fear of God. And what will not such a wretch dare to do? Even anything that Satan shall command him, though it be to go to a wizard. When Saul had given over inquiring after God, we hear him by and by knocking at the devil’s door, and asking counsel of a witch. Oh! take heed of living so near the tempter! If Satan might have his wish, surely it would be this—that the creature might live prayerless; for by this he should do the greatest spite possible to God; in that he makes the creature set him at nought in all his attributes, and have the greatest advantage against the sinner himself. Now he hath thee as sure as the thief hath the traveller, when he hath thrown him into a ditch fast bound, and stopped his mouth, that he cannot cry to others for help. In a word, thou art free booty for Satan, who may now satisfy his lust upon thee. He that prayeth invites God into his further acquaintance, and soon shall have it; as we see in Paul, who had Ananias sent from God to him. But he that lives in the neglect of this duty, gives the devil fuller possession of him. Thou art the man of all others most fit for him to make an atheist of. I should not wonder that the devil persuades thee there is no God, who already livest in such defiance against him as cannot but make the belief of a deity dreadful to thy thoughts. Herod was soon persuaded to cut off John’s head, because, when he was alive, he so troubled and nettled his conscience. And it is to be

fear'd thou wilt easily be drawn to attempt the stifling all thoughts of a deity, from whom thy criminous conscience expects to hear nothing that can please thee. Yea, it is probable thou hast too much of the atheist in thee already, or else thou durst not deny God that part of natural worship which they that know him least give unto him. I am sure the Scripture lays this brat of irreligion at the door of atheism, Ps. 14:1: ‘The fool’ there would fain persuade himself ‘there is no God,’ and when he hath got so far the mastery of his conscience as to blot God out of his creed, he then soon leaves him out of his paternoster, ver. 2.

Question. But, it may be, some will ask me whether I think that any do, where the gospel is preached, neglect prayer on this account of atheism?

Answer. Truly I do; and which is more, I think there are worse atheists to be found under the meridian light of the gospel, than in the darkest nook in America, where yet this day never broke. As weeds grow rankest in richest grounds, and fruits ripest in hottest climates; so do sins grow to the greatest height where the gospel-sun climbs highest. ‘Who is blind, but my servant?...and blind as the Lord’s servant?’ Isa. 42:19. Who such atheists as those that have their eyes put out by the light of the gospel? The poor Indian’s little knowledge of a God is for want of light; which may be cured, when it is brought to them. But if a judiciary atheism—as that in gospel times and places commonly is—falls upon a soul for rebelling against the light, this is incurable. Here the very visive faculty is perished, and the eye bored out.

[Exhortation to saints to abound in prayer.]

Use Second. To the saints. Be you provoked to ply this oar more diligently than ever. If this be neglected, a universal decay of all your graces follows. When the ports and havens of a kingdom are blocked up, that the merchant can not go forth, there follows a damp on all the inland trade, so that an enemy needs not strike a stroke, but only stand still to see them eat up one another. The psalmist tells of a stream which ‘makes glad the city of God,’ Ps. 46:4. The promise is this stream, upon which the saints have all their livelihood brought up to their very doors. If this be kept open, Satan cannot much distress them; which then is done, when they can send

out their prayers on this stream to heaven. But if once this trade be stopped, then they are hard put to it. It is observed of our neighbours the Netherlands, that whereas other nations used to be made poor by war, they have grown rich with it; because, with their wars, they have enlarged their trade and traffic abroad. And if thou, Christian, wouldst thrive by all thy temptations, thou must take the same course. Whatever thou dost, starve not thy trade with heaven. God hath—to make thee more diligent in this duty—so ordered things, that all the treasure of the promise is to be conveyed to thee in this bottom of prayer. This is like the merchant's ship, it 'bringeth her food from afar,' Prov. 31:14. If thy mercies were of the growth of thy own country, thou mightest spare a voyage to heaven. But alas! poor creature, when thou art best laid in, and thy storehouse fullest, if no foreign supplies should come unto thee from heaven, how soon wouldest thou be brought, with the poor widow, to eat thy last cake and die! It was not her little meal in her barrel, nor oil at the bottom of her cruse, but God's blessing multiplying them, that make them hold out so long. So, not thy present grace, strength, or comfort, but God's feeding these with a new spring, that thou must live upon. Now cease praying, and the oil of grace will cease running: 'Ye have not, because ye ask not.' And when the store is spent the city must yield. As thou wouldest not therefore fall into Satan's hands, lose not thy interest in God, thy best ally, for want of preserving a good correspondence with him at the throne of grace.

Now, for the better pursuit of this exhortation, some counsel would not be amiss in order to thy driving this trade of prayer more successfully. Satan hath received so many shameful overthrows by the saints' prayers, that he trembles at the force of this great ordnance of heaven. This is the voice, the mighty voice of God in his saints, which shakes those mountains of pride, divides the flames of fiery temptations, and makes them cast forth their abortive counsels to their shame and disappointment. 'O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness,' II Sam. 15:31. This one prayer made both Ahithophel a fool, and him that set him on work also—defeating the wisdom both of man and devil. Satan hath such an impression of dread upon him—from the remembrance of what he hath suffered from the hands of

prayer—that he will turn every stone, and try every way, to obstruct thee in it. 'What do we,' said the Pharisees concerning Christ, 'for this man doeth many miracles?...if we let him thus alone, the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.' Satan cannot deny but great wonders have been wrought by prayer. As the spirit of prayer goes up, so his kingdom goes down. It is of the royal seed. He can no more stand before it than falling Haman before rising Mordecai. And therefore, seeing this is like to do thee such great service against him, it behooves thee the more to defend it from his stratagems. Because the great artillery of an army is so useful to it, and formidable to the enemy, therefore it hath a strong guard set about it.

BRANCH THIRD.

[Satan's DESIGNS AGAINST PRAYER.]

Now Satan's designs against prayer are of three kinds. FIRST. If he can, he will keep thee from prayer. If that be not feasible, SECOND. He will strive to interrupt thee in prayer. And, THIRD. If that plot takes not, he will labour to hinder the success and return of thy prayer.

[Satan strives to KEEP FROM PRAYER.]

FIRST DESIGN. Satan's first design upon the Christian will be to keep him from prayer. To effect this he wants not his stratagems; many objections that he will start, and discouragements he will throw in thy way to this duty; hoping that if thou stumblest not at one, yet he may make thee fall by another, and be sick of thy enterprise before thou settest upon it. And, which is worst, thou wilt find a party in thy own bosom too ready to listen to what he saith, yea, to take up his arguments and maintain the dispute against thy engaging in this work. We shall pick up a few among many, and put an answer into thy mouth against he comes.

Satan keeps from prayer by charging
the Christian with hypocrisy.]

First Stratagem. ‘What! thou pray! If thou dost, thou wilt but play the hypocrite; and better not pray at all, than never the better!’ Nay, possibly thy own misgiving heart may suggest the same, or at least so far credit his charge, as to make thee waver in thy thoughts what thou shouldst do—pray or not. Now, to arm thee against this, consider,

1. Thou art but afraid thou shouldst play the hypocrite, if [you] pray; but thou wilt certainly prove thyself an atheist if thou dost not. And that is it which he would have. I hope thou art wiser than to neglect a known duty upon a jealousy thou hast of miscarrying in it; to lie down in a known sin—yea, so broad a one as brands him for an atheist that continues in it—for fear of meeting a lion, may be but a bugbear, in the way of thy obedience to an indispensable command.

2. Thou art in the less danger of playing the hypocrite, because of thy fear. Some bodily diseases indeed are caught with a fear and fancy. He is most like to have the plague or pox that fears most he shall have them. But none are so safe from sin as they that fear the falling into it most. The truth is, I would desire no better argument to prove thee sincere than this—to fear thy hypocrisy. Believe it, if this be the great trouble of thy soul, the devil hath more reason to fear thy sincerity than thou thy hypocrisy. And in all likelihood this it is that makes him to scare thee from prayer—because thou scare him so much by thy praying. If thou wert a hypocrite, as he pretends, himself would invite thee to it; yea, make a lane for thee, rather than that thou shouldst not come to the work; and when thou art risen from thy knees, he would thank thee for thy pains, because he knows God would not. The hypocrite does him more service than God. You do not believe, sure, that the devil was any great enemy to Jezebel’s fasting. Nay, I doubt not but he put it into her head, that she might thereby mock both God and man. Her fast was the devil’s feast. But,

3. If thou findest more cause to fear thy playing the hypocrite than I who am a stranger to thy heart have reason to do—who indeed can know so well how thy own heart beats as thyself?—I say, if thou fearest

this be the sin which is most likely to make a breach upon thee in thy duty, do as Moses, who slew the Egyptian to rescue the Israelite—destroy the sin, that thou mayest rescue thy soul from the neglect of a duty. Thou hast a very fair advantage, by the intelligence God graciously gives thee whence thy danger is most likely to come, of falling on thy enemy, and taking the fuller revenge on him, before thou settest about the work of prayer. Get but thy heart into a hatred of this odious sin, and fixed resolution against it, and, with God’s blessing, it shall neither be able to hurt thee, nor hinder thy prayer from finding welcome with God.

[Satan keeps from prayer by undervaluing
the Christian’s gift for it.]

Second Stratagem. ‘O but,’ saith Satan, ‘thou hast no gifts for prayer. Leave that for them that can perform this duty after a better fashion.’

What meanest thou by ‘gifts?’ If a rowling, flowing tongue which some have, whereby they are able on a sudden, with a long-continued discourse, to run over all the heads of prayer in a clear method, and clothe every petition with apt and moving expressions, we will suppose thou hast not this gift. But, God forbid that want of this should keep thee from praying, or make thee go the less comfortably to the duty. The want of these, show only thou hast not so good a head, but doth not the least hinder thy heart to be as gracious as theirs. And better of the two, that the defect should be found in thy head than in thy heart. Thy invention indeed in prayer by this will be more barren, but thy heart may be as fruitful over the few broken disjointed sentences that by piecemeal fall from thee, as theirs with their eloquent oration. Thy language will not be so trim and gaudy but thy soul and spirit may be as sound yea more upright, than many of those will be found who charm the ears of those that join with them by the music their words make. It is possible a man may have a rotten body under a gorgeous suit; and sub hâc purpurâ linguæ pannosam conscientiam—under the bravery of language a poor ragged conscience. Who had not rather be the healthful man in plain clothes, than unsound and diseased under rich apparel?—sincere with mean gifts, rather than rotten-hearted with raised parts.

We do not count him the best patriot in the parliament-house that plays the orator, and makes more rhetorical speeches than others, but he that takes with the best side, and whose vote is sure not to be wanting to carry on a righteous cause.

It is not the rhetoric of the tongue, but the hearty ‘amen’ which the sincere soul seals every holy request withal, that God values; and this thy honest heart will help thee to do, which his head cannot do for him that wants this sincerity. It is not the fairness of the hand that gives the force to the bond, but the person whose hand and seal it is. If it could, a scrivener might make all the country his debtors. Gifts may make a fair writing—which the hypocrite can do—but faith and sincerity make a valid prayer; and this alone can lay claim to the good things of the promise. In a word, sincere soul—for so I take thee to be—and if such, though thou hast not these praying gifts as others, yet thou hast as much interest in Christ, the ‘unspeakable gift,’ II Cor. 9:15, as any of them all. And, for thy everlasting encouragement, know, it is not those gifts in them, but this gift of God to thee and all believers, which is the key that must open God’s heart, if any mercy be got thence. Yea, this gift must sanctify their glistening gifts, as the altar did the gold upon it, or else they will be an abomination to the Lord.

[Satan keeps from prayer,
through present indisposition to it.]

Third Stratagem. Satan and the flesh too have their dilatory excuses to take thee off this duty, when thy stated usual time comes about for the performance of it. Dost thou never, Christian, when thou art addressing thyself to the throne of grace, hear Satan and thy flesh whispering in thine ear, ‘Christian, what art thou going to do? This is not a fit time for thy praying. Stay for a more convenient season.’ Here the devil seems modest. He saith not, Pray not at all, but ‘not now—not dissolve, but ‘adjourn’ the court for a fitter time.

Answer. Now beware, Christian, thy foot is near a snare. If thou takest the devil’s counsel, and waitest for his convenient season, may be it will prove like Felix’s ‘convenient season’ for calling Paul to a further hearing; which, for aught we find, never came

about. When the flesh or Satan beg time of thee, it is to steal time from thee. They put thee off duty at one time, on a design to shut thee out at last from this duty at any time. The devil is a cunning sophist; he knows a modest beggar may sooner obtain the little he asks, than he that saucily asks that which carries more unreasonableness in the request. Jephthah, who yielded to his daughter’s desire for a few months reprieve, would, it is like, not have heard her had she begged a full release from her father’s vow. A gracious soul is under a vow to call upon God. He knows such a motion would be flung back with the saint’s abhorrency upon his face, should he at the first dash bid him never pray more, and wholly leave his acquaintance with God. Therefore he would seem very willing he should pray. ‘Aye! by all means,’ saith he, ‘I would not have you turn your back on your best friend; but now is not so fit a season.’

[TWO PLEAS Satan hath to cheat the Christians of their seasons of prayer.]

1. The Christian’s present indisposition to prayer. 2. Some worldly business that then stays to be despatched.

1. Plea. The Christian’s present indisposition to pray. ‘Stay, Christian,’ saith the tempter, ‘till thou art in a better temper for duty, and thou wilt pray to more purpose. Better not write that scribble—leave the work undone, than go about it when thy hand is out.’ Now there is a double indisposition, which both Satan and the flesh make use of to colour their pretence with.

(1.) Indisposition of body. Some distemper lies on at present on that, and Scripture, say these, tells thee God loves mercy rather than sacrifice. And it cannot be denied but the Scripture will reach as far as the body, for God’s commands are not cruel to it.

Answer. But, to help thee out of this snare, tell me plainly, how great is this distemper of thy body? Haply thou art not so ill but thou canst go about thy worldly business, though with some groans and complaints in the same. But when thou shouldst pray, then thy head aches and shoots more than before. Art thou well enough to go into thy shop, and not to pray in thy closet? Canst thou waddle so far as to the market, and not pray at home? Canst thou overcome

thy distemper so far as to traffic with the world, and not to trade with heaven? Surely all is not right. God is but little beholden to thee. May not God say, I deserve thy company as well as the world? But, suppose thou beest right-down sick, and quite laid up from meddling in thy worldly employments; yet, will this excuse thee from visiting the throne of grace? God takes thee out of the shop to show thee the way into the closet. He knocks thee off thy worldly trade, that thou mayest follow thy heavenly the more close. Thou art not, indeed, able to pray in a continued discourse as in health. Neither doth God expect it. Here that Scripture, which the devil would have thee abuse, is pat, and suitable to thy present state: God loves mercy rather than sacrifice. Yet now, if ever, is the time for thee to shoot those *jacula præcatoria*—darts of ejaculatory prayer to God. When our body breathes shortest, it breathes quickest and oftenest. Though thou canst not pray long, yet thou mayest pray much in these pathetical sallies of thy soul to heaven. The Christian should have his quiver full of these arrows, which, though short, go with a force. Christ never prayed more earnestly than in his agony; which prayer was of this nature, ‘O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt,’ Matt. 26:39. And after a little pause—for nature to take some breath, by reason of that unspeakable burden which then lay upon it—he shoots the same dart again to heaven thrice, one after another, ver. 44. In a word, Christian, though thou canst not pray as thou wert wont, yet thou canst desire others to pray for thee and with thee. We are bid to send for the elders, yea and beg prayers of others too. So pitiful is God to us, that when, through our own weakness, we are disabled from delivering our own conceptions in prayer, that then we may bring forth as Bilhah on others’ knees. When we cannot go ourselves as we were wont to the work, we may be carried on the shoulders of their prayers, and fly on the wings of their faith to heaven.

(2.) Indisposition of heart. O but, secondly, thou mayest say, It is not the sickness of thy body, but the deadness of thy heart, and indisposition of thy soul, that keeps thee from duty. Thou wouldst fain have that in a better frame, and then thou wouldst not be long a stranger to it.

Answer (a). Let me ask thee, Christian, what

thou hast found—in the observation of thy own heart—to be the fruit that hath grown from such put-offs and excuses;—hath neglect of duty at one time fitted thee for it at another? I believe not. Sloth is not cured with sleep, nor laziness with idleness. If our leg be numb, we walk, and so it wears off. Satan knows if thou playest the truant to-day thou wilt be more loath to go to school tomorrow. Give the flesh a little scope and liberty by thus unlacing thyself, and it will endure less to be straitened afterwards. There is something to do to bridle a wanton beast, when hath got the bit once out of his mouth. The spouse’s coat sat very easy on her back, and unwilling no doubt she was to be stripped; but when once, by a wile of Satan, she was persuaded to put it off, how loath was she then to get it on again! And therefore, whenever you are turning from this or any other duty merely upon this account, consider well what is like to follow. One of these two will come of it. Either thou wilt see thy sin, and return with shame and sorrow for thy neglect. And is it not less trouble to pray now than upon such terms afterwards? A heathen could say, ‘He would not sin to buy repentance.’ And shouldst not thou have more wisdom to know which is a bad bargain for thy soul than he? Or, if not that, it will follow, secondly, that this neglect will beget another, and that a third, and so thou wilt run further in arrears with thy conscience, till at last thou givest over all thoughts of renewing thy acquaintance with God because thou hast discontinued it so long.

Answer (b). Examine from whence this present indisposition comes, and probably thou wilt find reason to charge it either upon some sinful miscarriage in thy Christian course, or on thy neglect of those preparatory means through which thou art to pass into the performance of this duty.

[1.] See whether thou hast not been tampering with some sin knowingly. There is an antipathy betwixt sinning and praying, partly from guilt, which makes the soul shy of coming into God’s sight, because conscious of a fault. The child that hath mis-spent the day in play abroad, steals to bed at night, or plays least in sight, for fear of a chiding, or worse, from his father. And also there is this antipathy between those two lines of acting, as the same doth roil and disorder the heart. Sin and prayer are such contraries, that it is impossible at one stride to step from

one to another. It is an ill time when the fountain is stopped or muddied, to go to draw water thence. If the workman's tools be blunt or gapped, no work can be well done till a new edge be set on them. It is the devil's policy thus to disturb and unfit the Christian for duty that he may leave it undone. And therefore, let thy first care be to keep the fountain of thy heart clear all the day long, as remembering that from it those holy affections which in prayer thou art to pour forth to God must be drawn. Look thou lendest not any power of thy soul to be Satan's instrument in sin's coarse foul work, lest thou find it out of case when thou art to use it in this spiritual service. A good servant will not have her dishes or pots foul when they should be used, but stand clean and bright upon the shelf, to be ready against they are called for. And so is the true Christian characterized. 'If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work,' II Tim. 2:21.

But again, if thou findest guilt to be contracted and thence a fear to come so nigh God, as this duty will bring thee, yea an estrangement also upon thy heart from this work, thy best way is to speedily to renew thy repentance, and so thy faith both for pardoning mercy and purging grace. New breaches are made up better than long quarrels; green wounds healed easier than old sores; spots washed out sooner when newly got than when ingrained by long continuance. Ply thee to the throne of grace. Water the earth, if thou canst, with thy tears, and fill heaven with sorrowful sighs for thy sin; but by no means shift off the duty on this pretence; for that is not the way to mend the matter, but make it worse. Jonah did ill to consult his credit rather than the exaltation of God's mercy; and how he should come honourably off with this embassage, than how the name of the great God his Master that sent him might be magnified. But he did worse than these sinful thoughts stirred in him—which he should have humbled himself for—made him run away from his Master's work also. Thus, Christian, it is ill done of thee to make a breach in thy holy course by tampering with any sin; but thou wilt commit a greater if thou turnest thy back on God also in that ordinance where thou shouldst humble thyself for thy former sin. Can one sin be a good argument for committing another?

Thou hast fallen into sin in the day; wilt thou not therefore pray at night? Surely it were better to beg of God forgiveness of this, and more grace, that thou mayest not do the like or worse to-morrow. Neglect of duty is not the way to help thee out of the pit thou art in, nor keep thee from falling into another. Take heed thou runnest not thyself further into temptation. Now is the time for the devil to set upon thee, when this weapon is out of thy hand. The best thou canst look for is a storm from God to bring back thee, his runaway servant, to thy work again. And the sooner it comes, the more merciful he is to thee.

[2.] If, upon thy faithful inquiry, thou findest not thy heart reproach thee to have indisposed thyself for duty by any known sin in the course of thy life, and yet thy heart continues lumpish and unfit for prayer, then probably thou wilt take thyself tardy in thy actual preparation to the duty. Hast thou therefore solemnly endeavoured, by suitable meditations, to blow the coal of thy habitual grace? which though not quenched by any gross sin, yet may be deadened, and covered with some ashes, by thy being over-busy in thy worldly employments. The well is seldom so full that water will, at first pumping, flow forth. Neither is the heart commonly so spiritual after our best care in our worldly converse—much less when we somewhat overdo therein—to pour itself into God's bosom freely, without some labour to raise and elevate it. Yea, oft the springs of grace lie so low, that only pumping will not fetch the heart up to a praying frame, but arguments must be poured into the soul—like so many pails of water into the pump—before the affections rise. Hence are those soliloquies and discourses, which we find holy men use with their own hearts to bring them into a gracious temper, suitable for communion with God in ordinances. 'Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,' Ps. 103:1, 2. It seems David either found or feared his heart would not be in so good a frame as he desired, that he redoubles his charge. He found sure his heart somewhat drowsy, which made him thus rub his eyes, and rouse up himself, now going to God in this duty. Sometimes calling and exciting the heart will not do, but the heart must be chid, and taken up roundly. So David was fain to deal with himself at another time. 'Why art

thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?' Ps. 42:11. Heavy birds must take a run before they can get upon the wing. It is harder to get a great bell up, than to ring it when it is raised. And so it is with our hearts. Harder work we shall find it to prepare them for duty, than to perform it when they are got into some order. Now, hast thou endeavoured this? If not, how canst thou make this a pretence to waive the duty because thou art indisposed, when thou hast not used the means to have thy clog taken off? This is as if one should excuse himself for not coming to the feast unto which he was invited, because forsooth he was not dressed, when indeed he never went about to make ready. But if thou canst answer to the former question, and in some uprightness say that thou hast not neglected preparatory means, but yet thy indisposition and deadness of heart remains, then we present you with another consideration. Though it be not so ordinary, yet it is possible, that a Christian may walk on those coals of meditation, which at one time would set his soul all on fire, and put his graces into a flame, yet at another he may find little warmth from them. We will suppose this to be thy case. Therefore,

Answer (c). Consider that God may, and doth, sometimes conceal his enlivening presence, till the soul be engaged in the work. And would it not grieve thee to lose such an opportunity? How oft hast thou found thyself at the entrance into a duty becalmed, as a ship which at first setting sail hath hardly wind to swell its sails—while under the shore and shadow of the trees—but meets a fresh gale of wind when got into the open sea? Yea, didst thou never launch out to duty as the apostles to sea, with the wind on thy teeth, as if the Spirit of God, instead of helping thee on, meant to drive thee back, and yet hast found Christ walking to thee before the duty was done, and a prosperous voyage made of it at last? Abraham saw not the ram which God had provided for his sacrifice till he was in the mount.

In the mount of prayer God is seen; even when the Christian does oft go up the hill towards duty with a heavy heart, because he can as yet have no sight of him. Turn not therefore back; but on with courage. He may be nearer than thou thinkest on. 'In that same hour,' saith Christ, 'it shall be given unto you,' Matt. 10:19. 'In the day,' said David, 'when I cried

thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul,' Ps. 138:3. It is no more than the promise gives us security for: 'The way of the Lord is strength.' Just as it is with a man, who at first going out on a journey feels a lassitude and feebleness in his limbs; but the farther he goes, the more strength he gathers, as if there arose strength out of the ground he walks on. Truly the saints find this in God's way: 'I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept thy law. This I had, because I kept thy precepts,' Ps. 119:55, 56. His meaning is, by doing his best endeavour to keep them, he got this by the hand, to be able to keep them better, and he thinks himself so well paid in for this his pains, that he glories in it—'This I had.' So the saint hath this for praying—he gets his heart in tune to pray better.

We may observe those children in Scripture which came of barren wombs were the greatest comforts to their parents when they had them. Witness Isaac, Samuel, and John. The greater deadness and barrenness thy heart, to thy own sense, lay under, and the less hope thou hadst to get out of the indisposition, the more joyful will the quickening presence of God be to thee. The assistance that thus surpriseth thee beyond thy expectation will be a true Isaac—a child of joy and laughter. And a double reason is obvious why God doth thus. You see it in the great delight the Lord takes in pure obedience. 'To obey is better than sacrifice,' I Sam. 15:22. To pray in obedience is better than barely to pray. This is the jewel in the ring of prayer. Now, to pray in pure obedience is to set upon the duty when there is no assistance visible or encouragement sensible—to go to duty not because God puts forth his hand to lead me, but because he holds forth his precept to command me. As when a general commands his army to march, if then the soldiers should stand upon terms, and refuse to go except they have better clothes, their pay in hand, or the like, and then they will march; this would not show them an obedient disciplined army. But if, at the reading of their orders, they presently break up their quarters, and set forth, though it be midnight when the command come, and they without money in their purse, clothes on their back—leaving the whole care of themselves for these things to their general, and they only attend how they may best fulfil his command—these may be said to march in obedience.

Thus, when a soul, after a faithful use of means, finds his heart dead and dull, yet in obedience to the command kneels down—though the sense of his inability is so great that he questions whether he shall have power to speak one word to God as he ought, yet had rather be dumb and dutiful, than disobedient in running away from his charge—here is an obedient soul, and he may hope to meet God in his way with that which he cannot carry with him—as the lepers, who, when they went, in obedience to Christ's command, to ‘show themselves to the priest,’ were cured by the way, though they saw nothing of it when they set forth.

Another fetch that Satan hath to make the Christian put off the duty of prayer as unseasonable at present, is—

2. Plea. Some worldly business or other that then is to be despatched; and therefore suggests such thoughts as these to divert him:—‘I have no leisure now to pray; this business is to be done, and that necessary occasion calls for my attendance. I will therefore adjourn the performance till I can come with more freedom and leisure.’

Now to arm thee, Christian, against such dilatory pretences, I shall lay down a few directions.

[FIVE DIRECTIONS to preserve against interference with seasons of prayer.]

(1.) Take heed of overcharging thyself with worldly business, which then is done when thou graspest more thereof than will consist with thy heavenly trade and Christian calling. God allows thee to give to the world that which is the world's, but he will not suffer thee to pay the world that which is due to him; rob Mary to lend to Martha, steal from thy closet to pay to thy kitchen. Thy particular calling is intended by God to be a help to thy general. It will therefore be thy sin to make that an encumbrance which is given as an advantage. And that which is itself a sin cannot be a plea for the neglect of a duty. that servant would mend a matter but little, who excuseth his not doing a business his master commanded, by telling him he had drunk too much when he should have gone about it. Nor will thy apology for passing thy time of prayer be better, that sayest thou hadst so much to do in the world that thou

couldst not find time to pray in.

(2.) Labour to time thy seasons for prayer with discretion in the things of the world. If we have two businesses to despatch in the same day, we contrive, if possible, that they may not interfere. And certainly a holy providence to forecast how we may reconcile daily the demands of our closet and shop, our devotions and worldly employments, by laying out each its portion of time, would ordinarily prevent much disorder and confusion in our walking. The prophet speaks of ‘the liberal man devising liberal things.’ We could not easily want time to pray in, if our hearts would but persuade our heads to devise and study how our other affairs might be disposed of without prejudice to our devotions. That cloth which a bungler thinks too little for a garment, a good workman can make one of it, and leave some for another use also. O there is a great deal of art in cutting out time with little loss.

(3.) Be sure thou keepest a right notion of prayer in thy thoughts. Some look upon every minute of time spent in the closet lost in the shop. And no wonder such are easily kept from prayer upon any pretended business, who think it a prejudice to their other affairs. But I hope, Christian, thou art better taught. Does the husbandman mow the less for whetting his scythe? Doth a good grace before meat spoil the dinner? No. Nor doth prayer hinder the Christian either in his employments or enjoyments, but expedites the one and sanctifies the other. All agree that to the despatch of a business—as to the winding of a skein of silk—nothing conduceth more than to begin at the right end of it. And to be sure the right end of any business is to begin with God, and engage him to help us. ‘In all thy ways acknowledge God,’ and ‘lean not unto thine own understanding,’ Prov. 3:5, 6.

(4.) The more straits and difficulties thou conquerest to keep up thy communion with God, the more kindly it is taken of God. No more friend is more welcome to us than he who breaks through many occasions to give us a visit. There is little cost, and so little love, in an idle man's visit—he that comes to see us because he hath nothing else to do. Mary was Christ's favourite, who trode the world under her feet, that she might sit at his feet. And the Bethshemites, who in their zeal—I confess their case

is extraordinary—came out of their very harvest-field, when they were reaping, to offer a sacrifice to the Lord, I Sam. 6:13.

(5.) Be faithful and impartial in considering the importance and necessity of that business which is propounded as an apology for not performing this duty at thy usual season. It cannot be denied but such a necessary occasion may emerge and fall out, for which the Christian may, without sin, adjourn the solemn performance of his devotions to another more fit time. Who doubts but a Christian may, when he riseth, go to quench his neighbour's house on fire, though by this he be kept out of his closet, and detained from offering to God that solemn morning sacrifice of praise and prayer he was wont? Yea, though the occasion be not extraordinary, if it be,

- (a) About that which is lawful in itself.
- (b) Of importance.
- (c) Necessarily then to be despatched. And,

(d) If it surpriseth us, and we do not bring it upon ourselves by our own fault, then the duty of prayer may without sin be adjourned for a fitter time.

But let us take heed of stamping a pretended necessity on things and actions, only to gratify our lazy hearts with a handsome excuse, whereby we may both save the pains of performing a duty, and also escape a chiding from our conscience for the non-performance of it. Of all fools he is the worst, that is witty to put a cheat on himself, and especially on his soul. Such a one must expect that the less his conscience barks at present, the more it will bite when it shall be unmuzzled.

Again, if the occasion be, as is said, important and necessary, whereby thou art called off from the solemn performance of this duty at present, then lift up thy heart in an ejaculatory prayer to God, to guide and guard thee. This is the short dagger thou art to use for thy defence against temptation, when thou hast not time to draw the long sword of solemn prayer. Thus thou mayst pray in any place, company, or employment. A short parenthesis interrupts not the sense of discourse, but gives an elegancy to it. And a short ejaculation to heaven will not interrupt any business thou art about, but advantage it much.

Again, be careful to recover this loss which thy worldly business hath put thee to in thy communion with God, by more abounding in the duty upon thy

next opportunity. The tradesman who is kept from his dinner on the market-day, goes the sooner to his supper, and eats the freer meal at night. If you be hindered of your rest one night by business, you will take it up the next. O that we were as wise for our souls—what we are prevented of at one tie, to recover with advantage at another, by a double enlargement of our hearts in our prayers and meditations!

[Satan discourages from prayer because of THE GREATNESS OF THE REQUESTS.]

Fourth Stratagem. Satan discourages sometimes the Christian, when on his way to this duty, from the greatness of those requests which he hath to put up to the throne of grace. Thou art going to pray, Christian, will he say, and will nothing serve thee less than pardon of sin, love and favour of God, with eternal life, &c.? Surely thou art too free of another's purse, and too kind to thyself, if thou thinkest to be welcome at God's door with so bold an errand. This is a boon reserved for some few favourites, and darest thou think so well of thyself that thou art one of them?

Now to arm thee, Christian, against this, that thou mayest neither be kept from the duty, nor go misgivingly to it upon this account, the greatness of thy request, ponder upon these five considerations, which will amount to a full answer to this cavil. 1. Oppose the greatness of that God thou art going to make thy address unto, against the greatness of thy request. 2. Oppose the promise to thy fears. 3. The valuable consideration on which they are made. 4. The greatness of the request cannot hinder, because they are most welcome that ask most. 5. God exceeds his people's asking.

[Fivefold answer to Satan's discouragement to prayer from the greatness of the request.]

Answer 1. Oppose the greatness of that God thou art going to make thy address unto, against the greatness of thy request. We are bid to 'ascribe greatness to our God,' Deut. 32:3. And if ever, especially when kneeling down to pray. Wert thou to put up thy request to some puny prince, or petty creature, thou hadst reason to consider whether thy pitcher were not

too great that thou wouldest have filled. Possibly thou mayest ask such a one more at one clap than he is worth. ‘Help, my lord, O king,’ said the woman in the famine of Samaria, yet she had no relief: ‘If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee?’ II Kings 6:26, 27. Or possibly, if he hath power, he may want a heart to part with so much as will serve thy turn. There are many of Nabal’s name in the world—such churls, who think every bit of bread lost that they eat not themselves; yea, some who grudge their own belly its necessary food. Wert thou at the door of such as those, what couldst thou expect but cold welcome? But remember he is a great God, great in power. Thou canst not overask. Thou mayest draw thine arrow to the head, and yet not overshoot the power of God. Even when thou hast drawn thy desires to the highest pitch, he shall be above thee; ‘for he is able to do exceedingly above what we can ask or think.’

Wouldst thou have thy sins pardoned? Yes, if they were not too great, thou sayest. But can God at once discount such a sum, and discharge so vast a debt, that hath been gathering many years by a full trade of constant sinning, with so great a stock of means and mercies as I have had; and thereby the unhappy advantage of making the greater return? Yes, he is able ‘abundantly to pardon,’ without any wrong to himself or control from any other. The sovereign power of life and death being in his hands, he is accountable to none;—as not for acts of justice, so neither of mercy. ‘It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?’ Rom. 8:33, 34. If, indeed, a man forgive a wrong done unto him, thou canst not think thyself therefore acquitted by God; his wrath may still chide on thee. Man cannot give away God’s right. Were a man so kind as to forgive a thief that robbed him, yet it is not in his power to discharge him of the penalty of the law. But if the prince, who is the law-giver, will do it, none can gainsay. If God will pass an act of mercy, thou art free indeed; for the power lies in his hands.

Is it any masterly lust, from whose tyranny thou wouldest beg deliverance? The God thou prayest to is able to break open thy prison door, and make thee, a poor captive, go out free. He can give these thine enemies as dust to thy sword, and as driven stubble to thy bow; yea, destroy them with a cast of his eye: ‘The

Lord looked unto the Egyptians...and troubled their host,’ Ex. 14:24. His very look was as heavy as a mill-stone about their necks. Presently they sank, horse and rider, like lead to the bottom of the sea. And sin and Satan are no more before God than were Pharaoh and his host.

In a word, is it comfort thou wouldest ask if it might be had? O, know he is a Creator thou prayest to! Though thy heart were as void of comfort as the chaos was of light, yet can he with a word cause a new heaven of joy to arise out of thy confused soul, and make in one moment to step out of darkness into light. Neither is his mercy less than his power. O, launch therefore into this bankless, bottomless sea, by thy faith! Behold the wonders of God in these depths, and do not stand reasoning thyself into unbelief by any uncomely comparisons between God and the narrow-hearted creature. ‘He is God and not man.’ None of these defects are to be found in his mercy which we impotent creatures find in ourselves. The paleness we see sometimes is not in the sun, but from the clouds that interpose. The stars do not blink nor twinkle, as is thought; but we—because of their vast distance, and our weak organ—cannot behold them with a fixed eye. Nor have the jealousies and fears entertained by tempted souls, to the disparagement of the mercy of God, any foundation in the divine nature, but are mere entia rationis—bugbears, which, through the darkness of their troubled spirits, and distemperature of a melancholy fancy, Satan hath the advantage of affrighting them with. O, beware therefore thou dost not disfigure the sweet lovely face of God’s mercy—which smile alike upon every poor, penitent, praying soul—while thou fanciest God to have a cast of this his eye, and to look more favourably upon one than another, lest by this you do betray the glorious name of God to be rent in pieces by your cruel unbelief! If you once come to wrap up God in your hard thoughts as slow to hear—hard to be wrought on with your prayers and tears; truly then Satan may easily persuade you to commit any sin against him, because you expect no mercy from him.

Answer 2. Oppose the promise to thy fears. There is no mercy thou canst desire but is promised beforehand unto the prayer of faith. The mercy thou wouldest have is already voted in heaven, and the grant passed; only God stays for thy coming over to the

throne of grace, there to lay thy claim to the promise before he issueth it forth. The mercy lies in the womb of the promise, but stays for thy prayer of faith to obstetricate, and give it a fair deliverance. ‘The children are come to the birth,’ said Hezekiah—the promise is big—wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left, Isa. 37. That is, if anything will help, it must be that. What can a petitioner desire more in his address to a prince for some great favour, than to be assured not only a prince is of a gracious merciful nature, but also that he hath obliged himself to give that which he hath in his thoughts to desire? And shall only the promises of God be counted light and little worth? Have you not heard of such a promise: ‘Ask, that your joy may be full?’ Did ever a vain word drop from the lips of truth? Doth he make an order one day, and reverse it another? Are his words yea and nay? and not rather ‘yea and amen’ for ever? II Cor. 1:20. Beggars use to be quick-sighted. Benhadad’s servants saw light at a little hole; and gathered from a few kind words which dropped from Ahab’s mouth, that there was mercy raked up in his heart towards their master, which they soon blew up. Joab saw David’s bowels working towards Absalom through the casement of his countenance, and therefore lets down the widow’s parable as a bucket to draw out that mercy which lay in his heart like water in a deep well. How much more encouragement hast thou, Christian, to plead with thy God, who art not put to guess at God’s thoughts, but hast the assurance of plain promises for thy good speed?

O what fools, and how slow of heart are we to believe the good word of God! If Moses supposed his brethren would have understood, by the kind visit he gave them, and his friendly office in rescuing one single Israelite from his oppressor’s hand, that God would by him deliver them all; how much more may God expect that his people should understand his purposes of love towards them, when he exposeth his heart to so open a view of their faith by his promise, and hath sealed the truth thereof with so many examples to whom already full payment hath been made of the same? And do we yet read them, as once the eunuch that sweet promise, Isa. 53, and understand not the meaning of them? Do we yet sit so near our comfort, as Hagar by the well, and our eyes held not to see it? Can we yet walk over the promises as

barren ground, when, with a little digging into them, we might find a treasure to pay all our debts and supply all our wants?

Answer 3. Oppose to thy fears not only the greatness of the promises, but also the valuable consideration upon which they are made. Christ pays for what thou prayest. Thou, indeed, beggest alms, but Christ demands that same as debt. God is merciful to thee, but just to him. And therefore, Christian, though it becomes thee to sink thyself beneath the least mercy in thy own thoughts, yet it behooves thee to be tender of Christ’s credit, whose merit is far above the greatest mercy thou canst beg as thou art beneath the least. The Father will give you little thanks for casting any dishonourable reflection upon his Son, on whom himself hath heaped so much glory; yea, with whose honour his own is so interwoven, that whoever dishonours the Son dishonours the Father that sent him. Now there are three privileges purchased for every believer; and none of them can be lost by us without dishonour to him.

(1.) He hath purchased a liberty to pray. It had been death to come on such an errand to God till he had by his blood paved a way and procured a safe conduct, Heb. 10:17.

(2.) An ability to pray as he purchased the Spirit for us; called therefore ‘the Spirit of promise.’

(3.) The safe return of our prayers. ‘Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you,’ John 16:23. Indeed, it is his business now in heaven to own our cause there in open court, and to present his blood as ready money to be laid down for all his saints beg, that no demur be made to their requests. So that, either thou must blot this article of Christ’s intercession out of thy creed, or else put thyself to shame for questioning thy entertainment with God when thou hast so good a friend at court to speak for thee.

Answer 4. The greatness of thy request cannot hinder thy speeding, because thou art most welcome that ask most. Who are the persons frowned on at the throne of grace but those who lay out the strength of their desires, and bestow their greatest opportunity for mercies of least weight and worth? ‘And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds,’ Hosea 7:14. Mark! the Lord did not account that they had prayed at all for all their loud

cry; and why? but because he disdained their low and drossy spirit in crying loudest for that which they deserved least, as the following words will resolve us, ‘They assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me,’ they would have a good crop with a full vintage; and these scraps should serve them, so as not to trouble God for any more. God, his love and favour, are quite left out of the story. May they but have their bellies crammed they have all their wish, and leave the other for those that like them better. O how God abhors these prostrate souls and carnal prayers! When men ‘tithe mint and cummin’ in their prayers, but neglect the weightier things of the promises, such are an interest in Christ, forgiveness of sin, a new heart, grace here and glory hereafter! Or, when they aim at low and base ends in praying for these things that in themselves are noble and high! And therefore fear not the greatness of thy request. God had rather give thee heaven than earth. He can more willingly bestow himself on thee that art in love with him, than a crust of bread on another that regards him not. The greater the mercy is thou askest, the greater the rent and revenue wilt thou pay him for it. The less he gives the less he receives. By low requests thou wrongest two at once. Thou art a thief to thyself, in wanting what thou mayest have for asking—in bringing a little vessel when thou mightest have a great one filled. Neither art thou so good a friend to thy God as thou shouldst; for the less grace thou hast from him, the less glory thou wilt return unto him. The reflex beams are proportionable to the lightsome body they come from. When grace is weak, the reflection it makes of praise and glory to God can be but weak and dark.

Answer 5. God is so free and redundant in communicating his mercy, that he exceeds his people’s modesty in asking. He gives them commonly their prayers with an overplus more than they have faith or face to ask; as Naaman, when Gehazi asked one talent, would need force two upon him. Abraham asked a child of God when he wanted an heir in whom he might live when dead. Now God promises him a son, and more than so, a numerous offspring; yea, more still, such an offspring, that in his offspring ‘all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.’ Jacob, he desired but God’s pass, under the protection of which he might go and return safely, with food and raiment

enough to keep him alive, Gen. 28:20. Well, this he shall have. But God thinks it not enough; and therefore sends him home with two bands, who went out a poor fugitive with little besides his pilgrim’s staff. Solomon prays for wisdom, and God throws in wealth and honour, II Chr. 1:10. The woman of Canaan begs a crumb—as much as we would cast to a dog—and Christ gives her a child’s portion. She came to have her sick child made well, and with it she hath the life of her own soul given her. Yea, Christ puts the key of his treasure into her own hand, and leaves her as it were to serve herself: ‘Be it unto thee even as thou wilst,’ Matt. 15:28.

[Satan strives to INTERRUPT FROM PRAYER.]

SECOND DESIGN. A second design Satan hath against the Christian is, to interrupt him in the act of prayer, when he can by no means keep him from it. It is hard to steal a prayer and the devil not know what thou art going about. He watches thy motions, Christian, and is at thy heels wherever thou turnest. If thou art about any evil action, he is at thy elbow to jog thee on, or before thee to remove every stone out of the way, that the bowl may go the more smoothly on, and thou mayest not be sick of the enterprise by the rubs thou meetest in the way. Ahab had but a plot hatching in his thoughts of going up to Ramoth-Gilead, and presently Satan hath his knights of the post whom he sends to bid him go up and prosper. David himself had but some proud thoughts stirring him up to number the people; Satan takes the advantage, and works with the humour now moving, whereby it soon ripened into that sore which God lanced with so sharp a judgment as the loss of seventy thousand men. Now he is as skilful and ready at hand to disturb a holy action as to promote a wicked.

When the sons of God some to present themselves before the Lord, Satan forgets not to be among them. He is no recusant, scruples not to be present when you worship God; indeed he is first there and last thence. Sometimes thou shalt find him injecting motions of his own, sometimes wire-drawing thy own. When he sees a vain thought, a sin sprung by thy wanton fancy, he will help thee to pursue the chase. To be sure, he will be at one end of every inordinate motion of thy heart; either the father to beget, or the

nurse to bring them up. These are so many and diverse, that we may as well tell the atoms we see in a sunbeam, as number and sort this miscellaneous heap of roving thoughts which are incident to the Christian in prayer. Sometimes he will inject such as are sinful, proud, filthy, yea blasphemous thoughts. Not that he hopes to find entertainment in the Christian's heart for such guests—much less to make a settlement of them there with the gracious soul's consent; but to make a hurly-burly and confusion in his spirit, whereby—as upon some sudden scare in our assemblies—the holy exercise he is now about may be hindered. Sometimes he will prompt thoughts holy in themselves but impertinent, which, at another time, himself would oppose with all his might, but now presents them, because most likely to find welcome, and fit enough to serve his present purpose, being, though good fruit, yet brought forth in a bad season. I believe none that have any acquaintance with this duty, and their hearts in it, are altogether strangers to Satan's slights of this nature. Now he hath a double plot; one levelled against God himself, another against the Christian thereby.

[The double plot of Satan in interrupting prayer.]

First Plot. In interrupting prayer Satan hath a plot against God. The devil knows very well that not the least part of his tribute of honour is paid by the Christian upon his knees in this solemn act of divine worship, to intercept which is both his great ambition and endeavour. Nay, he despairs not—if his design takes—to make the Christian dishonour him most, where God looks his name should be above all sanctified. Indeed, those have the unhappy opportunity of casting the greatest indignities on God who are admitted to stand nearest to him. Should he who hath the honour to set the crown on his prince's head, bring it in a filthy case, and so clap it on—or, instead of the king's own royal crown bring some ridiculous one of straw, or such like stuff contrived on purpose to make laughter—what greater scorn could such a one possibly invent to throw upon his prince? The attributes of God are his royal diadem, and it is no small honour that the great God puts upon the Christian, by admitting him as it were to set this crown upon his head, which he doth when in prayer he gives him the

glory of his majesty and holiness, power and mercy, truth and faithfulness, &c., with such humble adoration, and holy ravishment of affection, as may comport with the indefinite perfections of his deity.

But if our present thoughts in prayer be not of God, or not suitable to God and these his glorious excellencies, we pollute his name, and not honour it. We mock him, not worship him. In a word, we pull off his crown as much as in us lies, rather than set it on. Now doth not thy heart tremble, Christian, in thy bosom, to think thou should be Satan's instrument to offer such an indignity as this unto thy God and King? Thou art, if a saint, the temple of the Holy Ghost; prayer, the spiritual sacrifice which from the altar of a humble heart thou art to offer; wilt thou now suffer Satan to sit in this temple of God, and exalt himself there—by any vain, much less vile, thoughts—above God himself, whom thou art worshipping? Suppose, while a prince is at dinner, a company of impudent ruffians should rush into the room through the negligence of the prince's servants that are waiting on him, and they should throw the dishes, one this way, another that way, would not these servants deserve a severe rebuke that looked no better to the door? Ordinances of worship are God's table, the sacrifices under the law called God's food and bread. When the saint is praying the King of heaven sits at his table, Song 1:12. The dishes served up are the graces of his Spirit in the saint. Now wandering thoughts, they come in and turn the table as it were upside down; they spill the spikenard which thou wouldest pour forth. How ill may thy God take it that thou lookest no better to the door of thy heart!

Second Plot. In interrupting prayer Satan hath a plot against thee, Christian.

1. If he can get thee to sport with these, or sluggishly yield to them without making any vigorous resistance, that prayer, he knows, will neither do him hurt nor thyself good. Dost [thou] think God will welcome that prayer to heaven which hath not thy heart to bear it company thither? And how can thy heart go with it when thou hast sent it another way? It were a vain thing to expect that ship should make a prosperous voyage which is set adrift to sea to be carried whither every wave it meets will drive it, without any pilot to steer it to a certain haven, or such a one that hath no skill or care to hold the helm with a

steady hand. Such are the prayers that come from a roving heart. Will God hear thee when thou mockest him? And if this be not to mock him, what is? Like children that give a knock at a door and then run away to their play again, thus thou rearest up thy voice to God, and then art gone in thy roving thoughts to hold chat with the world or worse, forgetting whom thou spakest last to. Is not this to play bo-peep with God? *Magnam injuriam Deo facio, cum precor, ut meas preces exaudiat, quas ego qui fundo, non exaudio; deprecor illum, ut mihi intendat, ego vero, nec mihi, nec mihi, intendo.* Thus the holy man complains of himself how injurious and unworthy of God his carriage was in prayer—‘I would have God,’ saith he, ‘hear my prayer which myself doth not, when I put it up; I would have God’s ear attentive to me, when I neither mind God nor myself when I pray.’

2. He disturbs thee in praying, that he may make thee weary of praying. Indeed, he is not likely to miss his mark if thou lettest these vermin go on to breed in thy heart; for these will rob thee of the sweetness of the duty; and when the marrow is once out, thou wilt easily be persuaded to throw the bone away. *Omnis vita gustu ducitur*—he is in danger to forsake his meat who hath lost his relish of it. Prayer is a tedious work to him that hath no pleasure in performing of it; and weariness in it stands next door to being weary of it.

3. Thou provokest the Spirit of God—that alone can carry you through the work—to withdraw his assistance. Who will help him that minds not what he does? You know what Joab said to David when he indulged his inordinate passion for the loss of Absalom, ‘If thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee,’ II Sam. 19:7. Truly, either thou must speedily rouse thyself out of thy sloth and non-attendance, or else the Spirit will be gone; and he departed, it will be worse with thee than ever. Who hast thou then to help thee in thy work? And thou wilt find it harder to bring him back, than to keep him from going. The necessary infirmities which cleave to thy imperfect state, if protested against, shall not drive him away; but if thou lettest them nestle in thy heart, he takes it as thy giving him warning to be gone. An affront done to an ambassador by the baser sort of people as he walks in the

street—while resident in a foreign state—may be passed over; but when such shall find countenance from the prince, it then makes a breach. Take heed, therefore, of showing favour to such disturbers of the league betwixt God and thy soul. Thy heart, which should be a house of prayer, Christ will not endure to have it a place of merchandise. Either thou must whip these buyers and sellers out, or the Spirit will go. We read of an ‘abomination of desolation standing in the holy place,’ Matt. 24:15, which some interpret to be the Roman ensigns there displayed when Jerusalem was taken. This abomination ushered desolation. What dost thou, by thy roving thoughts, but set up an abomination in the temple of thy heart? O! down with these, as thou wouldest not be left desolate, and wholly void of God’s gracious presence with thee.

Question. But, it may be, now you will ask, ‘What counsel can you give to arm us against both these incursions of Satan and bubblings of our own vain hearts in prayer? How can we keep either our hearts in, or these out?’

{Answer.} Impossible, indeed, it may be wholly to prevent them, they come so suddenly and secretly—even as lightning in at the window. We may as well keep the wind out of our house—which gets in at every crevice, though the doors be shut—as wholly free our hearts from their disturbance. Yet this will not disoblige us from our utmost care and endeavour to hinder the prevalency of them. Humours, while rouling here and there, do not endanger us so much as when they gather to a head, and settle in some joint and part of the body. I have read of some eastern parts of the world, where such multitudes of locusts and caterpillars are seen, that they almost darken the air as they fly, and devour every green thing where they light. The inhabitants, therefore, when they perceive this army hovering over them, by making fires in their fields, keep them from lighting with the smoke that ascends therefrom. Thou canst not hinder these roving thoughts from flying now and then over thy head, but surely thou mayest do something that may prevent their settling. Towards which good work take these directions, which I shall endeavour to suit to these several causes from whence they proceed. The wanderings in prayer may be referred to four causes. First. The natural vanity and levity of

our minds. Second. A dead and inactive heart in him that prayeth. Third. Encumbrance of worldly cares. Fourth. Non-observance of the heart in the act of prayer.

[Four causes of wandering thoughts in prayer.]

First Cause. The first cause, and indeed original of all other, is the natural vanity and levity of our minds, which are as inconsistent as quicksilver, that hath, they say, principium motus, sed non quietis—the principle of motion, but not of rest. They are as unstable as water, which fluid element—as we see in a little of it poured on the ground—diffuseth itself hither and thither, and so is soon drunk up and lost. Thus do our vain minds scatter themselves into impertinencies; but never so much as when we are conversant about spiritual duties. Then, above all, we discover the lightness of our spirits. And this is not the least part of that evil which followed man's degeneracy, who by his fall wounded both head and heart. Now, though there be a cure in part made by the grace of God as to both these in a saint, yet there still remains a craze in his soul, whereby he is not able to dwell long upon spiritual things without some dissipation of his thoughts, as innocent Adam could—who, before his fall, might have walked through the whole world, and not have had one thought of his heart misplaced, or turned from its right point by the diversity of objects he met, they being all to the eye of his soul a clear medium, through which it passed to terminate itself in God, as the air is now to our bodily eye, through which it pierceth, and stays not till it comes at the body of the sun. But, alas! it is with us as with one that hath had his skull broke by some dangerous fall, who, when recovered, finds his brain so weakened that, when he goes about any serious business, he cannot intend much, or persist long, but is off and on, out and in. Such vagaries and cross steps do our hearts take in duty. And this gives Satan advantage enough to work upon. If the ship be light for want of ballast, and a strong gust of wind arises too, O how hard then is it to make it sail trim, or keep from toppling over! A vain heart, and a strong temptation together, makes sad work, when God stands by and gives Satan leave to practice upon it. Be therefore careful to take in thy ballast before thou

puttest to sea. Labour to poise thy heart before thou goest to pray. Which, that thou mayest do, improve the following directions.

[DIRECTIONS against levity in prayer.]

1. Direction. Innure thyself to holy thoughts in thy ordinary course. The best way to keep vessels from leaking—when we would use them for some special occasion—is to let them stand full. A vain heart out of prayer will be little better in prayer. The more familiar thou makest holy thoughts and savoury discourse to thee in thy constant walking, the more seasoned thou wilt find thy heart for this duty. A scholar, by often rubbing up his notions when alone, and talking of them with his colleagues, makes them his own; so that, when he is put upon any exercise, they are at hand, and come fresh into his head. Whereas another, for want of this filling, wants matter for his thoughts to feed on, which makes him straggle into many impertinencies before he can hit of that which suits his occasion. The carnal liberty which we give our hearts in our ordinary walking, makes our thoughts more unruly and unsuitable for duties of worship. For such thoughts and words leave a tincture upon the spirit, and so hinder the soul's taking a better colour when it returns into the presence of God. Walk in the company of sinful thoughts all the day, and thou wilt hardly shut the door upon them when thou goest into thy closet. Thou hast taught them to be bold; they will now plead acquaintance with thee, and crowd in after thee; like little children, who, if you play with them, and carry them much in your arms, will cry after you when you would be rid of their company.

2. Direction. Possess thy heart with a reverential awe of God's majesty and holiness. This, if anything, will 'gird up the loins of thy mind' strait, and make thee hoc agere—mind what thou art about. Darest thou toy and trifle with the divine majesty in a duty of his worship! carry thyself childishly before the living God! to look with one eye upon him, as it were, and with the other upon a lust! to speak one word to God, and chat two with the world! Does not thy heart tremble at this? Sic ora, saith Bernard, quasi assumpsitus et præsentatus ante faciem ejus in excelso throno, ubi millia millium ministrant ei—so pray as if thou

wert taken up and presented before God sitting on his royal throne on high, with millions of millions of his glorious servitors ministering to him in heaven. Certainly the face of such a court would awe thee. If thou wert but at the bar before a judge, and hadst a glass of a quarter of an hour's length turned up—being all the time thou hadst allowed thee to improve for the begging of thy life, now forfeited and condemned—wouldst thou spare any of this little time to gaze about the court, to see what clothes this man had on, and what lace another wears? God shame us for our folly in misspending our praying seasons. Is it not thy life thou art begging at God's hand; and that a better, I trow, than the malefactor sues for of his mortal judge? And dost thou know whether thou shalt have so long as a quarter of an hour allowed thee when thou art kneeling down? And yet wilt thou scribble and dash it out to no purpose upon impertinencies? If thou dost, why no better? Why no closer and compact in thy thoughts? Will God judge us for 'every idle word' that is spoken in our shop and house, at our work, yea sport and recreation? And shall thy idle words in prayer not be accounted for? And are not those idle words that come from a lazy heart, a sleepy heart, that minds not what it says? What procured Nadab and Abihu so sudden and strange an death? Was it not their strange incense? And is not this strange praying, when thy mind is a stranger to what thy lips utter? Behave thyself thus to thy prince if thou darest. Let thy hand reach a petition to him, and thine eye look or thy tongue talk to another; would he not command this clown, or rather madman, to be taken from before him? 'Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence?' 1 Sam. 21:15, said Achish when David behaved himself discomposedly. O! could you but look through the keyhole, and see how glorious angels in heaven serve their Maker, who are said to 'behold the face of God continually,' surely thou wouldst tremble to think of thy slightly performing this duty.

3. Direction. Go not in thy own strength to this duty, but commit thyself by faith to the conduct of the Spirit of God. God hath promised to prepare, or establish, as the word is, the heart. Indeed, then the heart is prepared when established and fixed. A shaking hand may soon write a right line as our loose

hearts keep themselves steady in duty. Shouldst thou, with Job, make a covenant with thine eye, and resolve to bung up thine ear from all by-discourse, how long, thinkest thou, shouldst thou be true to thine own self, who hast so little command of thine own thoughts? Thy best way were to put thyself out of thine own hands, and lay thy weight on him that is able to bear thee better than thy own legs. Pray with David, 'Uphold me with thy free spirit,' Ps. 51:12. The vine leaning on a wall preserves itself and its fruit, whose own weight else, without this help, would soon lay it in the dirt.

Second Cause. A second cause of these wandering roving thoughts in prayer, is a dead and unactive heart in him that prayeth. If the affections be once down, then the Christian is as a city whose wall is broken down. No keeping then the thoughts in, or Satan out. The soul is an active creature. Either it must be employed by us, or it will employ us, though to little purpose. Like our poor, find them work and they keep at home. But let them want for it, and you have them roving and begging all the country over. The affections are as the master-workmen, which set our thoughts on work. Love entertains the soul with pleasant and delightful thoughts on its beloved object. Grief commands in the soul to muse with sorrowful thoughts on its ail and trouble. So that, Christian, as long as thy heart bleeds in the sense of sin, they will have no leisure, when thou art confessing sin, to rove and wander. If thy desires be lively, and flame forth in thy petitions, with a holy zeal for the graces and mercies prayed for, this will be as 'a wall of fire' to keep thy thoughts at home.

The lazy prayer is the roving prayer. When Israel talked of travelling three days' journey in the wilderness, Pharaoh said, 'Ye are idle, ye are idle; therefore ye say, Let us go.' As if he had said, 'Surely they have little to do, or else they would not think of gadding.' And therefore, to cure them of this, he commanded more work to be given, Ex. 5. We may truly say thus of our wandering hearts, 'They are idle.' We pray, but our affections are dead and dull. The heart hath little to do in the duty for the setting of its thoughts on work—only to speak or read a few words, which is so easy a task that a man may do it and spare whole troops of his thoughts to be employed elsewhere at the same time. But now, when the affections are up,

melting into sorrow in the confession of sin, sallying forth with holy panting and breathing in its supplications, truly this fixeth the thoughts. The soul intended can no more be in two places together than the body. And as these holy affections will prevent the soul's wandering disposition, so also make it more difficult for Satan to throw in his injections. Flies will not so readily light on a pot seething hot on the fire as when it stands cold in the window. Baalzebub is one of the devil's names—that is, the god os a fly—an allusion to the idolatrous sacrifices, where flies were so busy. This fly will not so readily light on thy sacrifice when flaming from the altar of thy heart with zeal.

Now, to preserve thy affections in prayer warm and lively, let it be thy care to chase and stir up the natural heat that is undoubtedly in thee, if a Christian, by the serious consideration of thy sins, wants, and mercies. While thou art pondering on these, thine eye will affect thine heart. They will, as Abishag did to David, by laying them in thy bosom, bring thy soul to a kindly heat in those affections which thou art to act in the several parts of prayer. Thy sins reviewed, and heightened with their aggravations, will make the springs of godly sorrow to rise in thy heart. Canst thou choose but mourn when thou shalt read thy several indictments to thy guilty soul, now called to hold up its hand at the bar of thy conscience? Canst thou hear how the holy law of God hath been violated, his Spirit grieved, and his Son murdered by thy bloody hands, and this when he hath been treating thee mercifully, and not mourn? Surely, should a man walk over a field after a bloody battle hath been fought, and there see the bodies, though of his enemies, lying weltering in their blood, his heart could not but then relent, though in the heat of battle his fury shut out all thoughts of pity. But what if he should spy a father or a dear friend dead upon the place, of the wounds which his unnatural hand had given, would not his bowels turn? Yes, surely, if he carried the heart of a man in his bosom. Thou mayest guess, Christian, by this, what help such a mediation would afford toward the breaking of thy heart for thy sins. Certainly it would make thee throw away that unhappy dagger which was the instrument to give those deep stabs to the heart of Christ—and this is the best mourning of all. Again, thy wants well

weighed would give wings to thy desires. If once thou wert possessed with the true state of thy affairs—how necessary it is for thee to have supplies from heaven, or to starve and die. And so in the rest, &c.

Third Cause. A third cause of roving thoughts, is encumbrance of worldly cares. It is no wonder that man can enjoy no privacy with God in a duty, who hath so many from the world rapping at his door to speak with him when he is speaking with God. Periclitatur pietas in negotiis—religion never goes in more danger than when in a crowd of worldly business. If such a one prays, it is not long before something comes in his head to take him off. ‘Isaac went out to meditate,...and behold the camels.’ The world is soon in such a one's sight. He puts forth one hand to heaven in a spiritual thought, but soon pulls it back, and a worldly one steps before it, and so makes a breach upon his duty. ‘A dream,’ Solomon tells us, ‘cometh through a multitude of business.’ And so do dreaming prayers. They are made up of heterogeneous independent thoughts. The shop, barn, warehouse are unfit places for prayer—I mean the shop in the heart, and the barn in the heart. I have read of one who was said to be a walking library, because he left not his learning with his books in his study, but carried it about with him wherever he went, in his memory and judgment, that had digested all he read, and so made it his own. And have we not too many walking shops and barns, who carry them to bed and board, church and closet? And how can such pray with a united heart, who have so many sharers in their thoughts? O anima sancta sola esto, anne nescis verecundum habes Sponsum!—O, holy soul, get thee alone, if thou wouldst have Christ give thee his loves. Knowest thou not thou hast a modest husband? Indeed he gives the soul not his embraces in a crowd, nor the kisses of his lips in the market. Jacob sends away his company to the other side of the river, and then God gave him one of the sweetest meetings he had in all his life. Let him now pray even a whole night if he will, and welcome. Now, Christian, for thy help against these—

[DIRECTIONS against the encumbrance
of worldly cares in prayer.]

1. Direction. Labour to keep thy distance to the

world, and that sovereignty which God hath given thee over in its profits and pleasures, or whatever else may prove a snare to thee. While the father and master know their place and keep their distance, so long will servants and children keep theirs, by being dutiful and officious. But, when they forget this—the father grows fond of the one, and the master too familiar with the other—then they begin to lose their authority, and the other to grow saucy and under no command. Bid them go, and it may be they will not stir. Set them a task, and they will bid you do it yourself. Truly thus it fares with the Christian. All the creatures are his servants. And so long as he keeps his heart at a holy distance from them, and maintains his lordship over them, not laying them in his bosom which God hath put under his feet, Ps. 8, all is well. He marches to the duties of God's worship in a goodly order. He can be private with God, and these not be bold to crowd in to disturb him. But when we grow fond of, and too familiar with, them, alas! how are we pestered with them! We read of no undutifulness of Hagar towards her mistress while a servant; but when Sarah gives her into Abraham's bosom, and admits her to share with herself in conjugal privileges, truly then she begins to jostle with her mistress, and carries herself saucily to her. Yea, and Abraham himself, who would not have stuck to have put her away before, yet now he hath taken her into his bed, can hardly persuade his heart to yield to it, till God joins with Sarah in the business, bidding him 'hearken unto his wife.'

Thus, Christian, use the world as a servant—which it was made for—and you may go to prayer, as Abraham up the mount, leaving his servants below. Thou shalt find they will not have that power to disturb thee. But, let either profits or pleasures share with Christ in thy conjugal affection, and thou wilt find thy heart loath to send this Hagar away, though at the request of Christ himself, when he is calling thee into communion with himself. Either use the world as if thou usedst it not, or you will pray as if you prayed not. The smoke and sparks that rise from a furnace are carried that way the wind lies. If thy heart be to the world, thou canst not then keep thy thoughts from driving thither. Then, and not till then, will thy prayer ascend like a pillar of incense, when there is a holy calmness on thy spirit, and this

boisterous wind of inordinate affections to the world be laid. I must not take thee off from diligence in thy worldly calling; this never spoils a good prayer, only watch thy heart that thou prostitute it not to the wanton embraces of it. That is the pure metalled sword or knife which bends this way and that way, but returns to its straightness again, and stands not bent. That heart is of the right make, and hath heaven's stamp upon it, which can stoop and bend to the lowest action of his worldly calling, but then returns to his fitness for communion with God, and his heart stands not bent to the creature, but in a direct line to God and his worship.

2. Direction. Strengthen thy faith on the providence of God for the things of this life. A distrustful heart is ever thoughtful. Whatever he is doing, his thoughts will be on that he fears he shall lose. When the merchant's adventure is insured—that whatever comes he cannot lose much—his heart then is at rest, he can eat his bread with quiet, and sleep without dreaming of shipwrecks and pirates. While another, whose estate is at sea, and fears what will become of it, O how is this poor man haunted wherever he is going, whatever he is doing, with disquieting thoughts! If he hears the wind but a little loud, he cannot sleep for fear of his ship at sea. Truly thus a soul by faith rolled on the promise will find a happy deliverance from that disturbance which another is pestered with in prayer. Wherefore God in particular directs us to lay this burden from our shoulders on his, when we go to pray, that no by-thoughts arising from these our cares may disturb us. 'Be careful for nothing, but...let your requests be made known unto God,' Php. 4:6. As if he had said, 'Leave me to take care of your work, and mind you to do mine. If things go amiss in your estates, names, families, I will take the blame, and give you leave to say God was not careful enough of you.' When the males of Israel went to worship God at Jerusalem, that they might not carry distracted minds with them—from the fear of their families left naked behind without a man to fight for them if an enemy should come—God takes the special care of their families in their absence, Ex. 34:24. If we have but a faithful servant, who we believe will look to our business as carefully as our own selves, this makes us go forth with a free and quiet spirit, and not trouble ourselves what is done at home when we are abroad.

O then, let us be ashamed if our faith on God's providence be not much more able to ease us of the burden of distracting cares.

Fourth Cause. These wandering thoughts are occasioned by the Christian's non-observance of his heart in the act of prayer. Let him be at never so much cost of preparatory pains before duty, yet if he doth not watch himself narrowly in the duty itself, his heart will give him the slip, and run into a thousand vanities and impertinencies. The mind of man is a nimble creature; in one moment you shall have it in heaven, and in the very next you shall find it on the earth. Like Philip, who being joined to the eunuch's chariot, on a sudden was carried out of his sight, and found at Azotus, a place far distant thence; thus our hearts are soon gone away from the duty in hand, and taken a vagary to the furthest part of the world in their wild imagination. Yea—which is worse—sometimes the mind is off and gadding, but the Christian goes on with his lip-labour and takes no notice that his thoughts are gone astray; as Joseph and Mary were gone a day's journey before they missed their child, who stayed behind with other company. Thus the Christian loses his heart in duty, and goes on with a careless formality, that sometimes the prayer is almost done before he observes his heart's seat to be empty, or considers that his soul and spirit hath not borne him company all the way; who, had he but at the first stepping aside of his thoughts been aware, might have recovered and rescued them out of the hands of those vanities which stole them, as David did his wives and children from the Amalekites, without any great trouble or loss. And therefore, Christian, keep thy heart with all diligence; observe whether it doth its part in the duty, or be as a string that sounds not in the concert. As you do with your children, so you had need do with your childish mind. Haply they wait on you to church, but when you are set, if not awed by your eye, they are gone, and may be playing all sermon time in the fields, and you miss them not; to prevent which, you set them before you that you may see their carriage and their behaviour. If thou didst thus pray, observing and watching thy thoughts, where, and what about, thou wouldest find more composure in thy spirit than thou dost.

Nay, do not only observe thy thoughts in duty, but call them to review after duty. Many go from

prayer too much like boys from school, that think no more of their lesson till they return again—leave praying, and all thoughts how they behaved themselves in prayer, together. For shame do not thus. If thou neglectest to take account of thyself, consider that thou must give an account both of it and this thy neglect after it before thy betters. God himself will have the full hearing thereof. He sets not any about a work, of which he means not to take cognizance how it was done. And were it not better that the audit should be in thy more private court, than thou be called to give up thy account at his dreadful tribunal? Resolve therefore to commune with thy heart upon this point; and the sooner thou goest about it the better it is like to be done, because then the circumstances of the action will be freshest in thy memory. Go not then out of thy closet till thou hast examined thy heart. If thy thoughts in prayer shall be found to have been in any measure free and entire, thy affections warm and lively, matter of joy will arise to thee, and thanksgiving to God that thou hast escaped the hands of so many rovers and freebooters that lay in wait to make prize of thee. But, take heed thou applaudest not thyself for thine own care and circumspection. Alas! thou wert not thine own keeper. He that lent his ear to thy prayer gave thee thy heart to pray, and also keep it up in duty. Say rather with David, 'Who am I, that I should be able to offer so willingly?' If thy heart upon the review be found to have played the truant, take shame, that thou beest not put to shame before the Lord. O blush to think thou shouldst be so unfaithful to God and thine own soul, yea so foolish, to run up and down on every idle errand which Satan sends thee, and in the meanwhile neglect thy own work of so great an importance! The spouse's complaint may fit thy mouth: 'They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept.'

He is an unwise messenger who, being sent to market to provide food, is drawn by every idle companion to spend both his time and money in vain, and at night comes home without bread for the hungry family. O! Christian, was not thy errand to the throne of grace to get new supplies from heaven for thy poor soul? And doth it not grieve thee to think that now thy soul must pinch, for thy playing away thy praying time and talent, which, as market money, was

put into thy hand to procure a new store? Yea, that thou hast been injurious to thy God by taking his name in vain? Thou appearedst in a praying posture; thy hand voice were lift up to heaven, as if thou meantest to pray; but—like him who said he would go into the vineyard, and did not—thou hast turned a contrary way, and set thy thoughts to work in another field. Will not this affect thy heart? Yes, surely, and afflict it also. And this affliction of thy spirit will be a sovereign means to excite thy care for the future. The faults which are unobserved are also uncorrected in the scholar's exercise, and so not like to be mended in the next. Wandering thoughts in prayer are like vagrants. No such way to rid the country of one, and the heart of the other, as by giving both the law—the lash, I mean.

Question. O! but, saith the Christian, I have used this means, and yet, to the grief of my heart, I am still pestered with them.

Answer. Take a few consolatory words to ease thy aching heart, that groans under the burden of these thy wandering thoughts.

[Consolatory thoughts for the Christian too much downcast through wanderings in prayer.]

1. Thought. The affliction of thy spirit for them speaks more comfort to thee, than the presence of them discomfort. That thou art annoyed with such troublesome guests is no more than the best of saints have found and acknowledged. Wherefore did David pray that God would ‘unite his heart to fear his name,’ but that he found it gadding? What means Paul by his complaint, ‘When I would do good, evil is present with me,’ but that he had not yet got the full mastery of his unruly thoughts? Thou seest it is no new disease thou art troubled with, but such as is common, not only to the sons of men, but the children of God—a spot that may be seen on a saint’s coat. But thy being afflicted for them, speaks one of these two things—and both of them have comfort in their mouth for thee. It proves that they are either Satan’s injections, and not the birth of thine own heart; or, if they stream from thy own heart, yet the Spirit of God is the indweller, and these but intruders.

(1.) The moan thou makest for being yoked to

such company is a sign they are rather sent in by Satan, than called in by thee—his injections, rather than the suggestions of thy own heart. Our own thoughts commonly are more taking with and pleasurable to us. The mother does not more love the fruit of her own body, than we do the product of our minds. Hence our ‘own ways,’ words, and thoughts are called our ‘pleasure,’ Isa. 58:13, and therefore they may be possibly shot from his bow—thy heart being so affrighted at them, and wounded for them. Or,

(2.) If they prove the offspring of thine own mind, yet thy afflicted soul shows that the Spirit and grace of God is the indweller, and these but intruders and involuntary motions, such as in thy deliberate thoughts thou abhorrest. Were they, as I may so say, of thy own house and family, thou wouldst not show this zeal to shut the door upon them, or shriek out when they come in upon thee. The wife does not cry out when husband, children, or servants come into the room, but when thieves and cutthroats, from whom she looks for nothing but cruelty. It seems they are neither of thine acquaintance, nor likest thou their company, by thy behaviour before them. Be not therefore over-troubled; for Satan, if he can but disquiet thy mind with false fears, he hath one part of his errand done for which he sends them. These wicked thoughts are upon no other terms with thee than holy thoughts are in the wicked. As those profit not them, because not entertained; so, for the same reason, shall not these hurt thee.

2. Thought. Know these be the necessary infirmities of thy imperfect state; and, so long as thou art faithful to resist and mourn for them, they rather move God’s pity to thee than wrath against thee. It is one thing for a child, employed by his father, willingly or negligently to spoil the work he sets him about; and another, when through natural weakness he fails in the exact doing of it. Should a master bid his servant give him a cup of wine, and he should willingly throw both glass and wine on the ground, he might expect his master’s just displeasure. But if, through some unsteadiness—it may be palsy in his hand—he should, notwithstanding all his care, spill some of it in the bringing, an ingenuous master will rather pity him for his disease, than be angry for the wine that is lost. And did God ever give his servants occasion to think him a hard master? Hath he not promised,

'that he will spare us as a father his child that serves him?' From whence come all the apologies which he makes for his people's failings if not from his merciful heart, interpreting them candidly to proceed rather from their want of skill than will, power, or desire? 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' Zech. 3:2, is Christ's answer in the behalf of Joshua, whom Satan accused for his filthy garments. 'The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,' Matt. 26:41, was his favourable gloss for his disciples' drowsiness in prayer.

3. Thought. Believers' prayers pass a refining before they come into God's hands. Did he indeed read them with their impertinences, and take our blotted copy out of our hand, we could not fear too much what the issue might be. But they come under the corrector's hand. Our Lord Jesus hath the inspection of them, who sets right all our broken requests and misplaced petitions. He washes out our blots with his blood. His mediation is the fine searce² through which our prayers are bolted. All that is coarse and heterogeneous he severs from the pure. What is of his own Spirit's breathing he presents, and what our fleshly part added he hides, that it shall not prejudice us or our prayers. This was the sweet gospel truth wrapped up in the priest's bearing the sins of their holy offerings, Ex. 28:38.

4. Thought. Though the presence of these be a great affliction to thee, yet God will make them of singular use to thee. (1.) To humble thee, and take all glorying from thee, that thou shalt not pride thyself in thy other assistances, which thou wouldest be prone to do if thy prayer had not this lame foot to humble thee. (2.) To keep thee wakeful and circumspect in thy Christian course. By thy disturbance from these thou seest the war is not yet quite done. The Canaanite is yet in the land. Though not master of the field, he is yet skulking in his holes and fastnesses, out of which he comes like an adder in the path, that by these sudden surprises and nibbling at thy heel he may make thee, like the rider, fall backward, and so steal a victory unawares of thee, whom

he despairs to overcome in a pitched battle by sins more deliberate. And truly, if he dare be so bold as to set upon thee when in communion with God—so nigh thy rock and castle—doth it not behoove thee, Christian, to look about thee, that he gets no greater advantage of thee when thou art at further distance from him in thy worldly employments? (3.) God will make thee by these more merciful to, and less censorious of, thy brethren of greater failings.

5. Thought. In thy faithful conflict with them thou mayest promise thyself, at last, victory over them. But expect this gradually to be done; not at once, nor hastily, to be delivered into thy hands, as God said of Israel's enemies. Therefore, maintain the fight: faint not at their stubborn resistance; pray, and mourn that thou canst pray no better; mourn and fight again; fight and believe them down, though sometimes they get thee under their feet. God made a promise to Noah after the flood, in which he gave him a sovereignty over the creatures. 'The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth,' Gen. 9:2. But we see many beasts are fierce, savage, and cruel to mankind. Yet thus it is fulfilled—that none are so fierce and unruly but, by man's art and industry, they have been and still are taken and tamed, as the apostle hath it, James 3:7. Thus God hath given his saints by promise, a sovereignty over sin and Satan; he will subdue both under your feet. The dread of the saints shall fall on the proudest devil, and his foot shall be set on the neck of the fiercest lust. Yet this will cost hot work before the one or other be effected.

[Satan strives to HINDER THE SUCCESS OF PRAYER.]

THIRD DESIGN. The third and last design that Satan hath against the saint in this great undertaking of prayer, is to hinder his success therein. He will have thee, Christian, if he can, one way or other, outwards or homewards; and it comes all to one whether the ship be taken as it goes forth or as it returns home. Nay, of the two it is the greater loss to be defeated of our expectations when we look for our prayers to come richly fraught with mercies from heaven. Now, two ways he labours to hinder the success of prayer.

First. He endeavours to hinder the welcome of

2. SEARCE, v. t. sers. To shift; to bolt; to separate the fine part of meal from the coarse. [Little used.]

SEARCE, n. sers. A sieve; a bolter. [Little used.]

From Webster's 1828 Dictionary. — SDB

their prayers with God, that they may be cast as a petition out of court which God will not look on.

Second. If he cannot prevail in this, then he plays an after-game, and will so handle the matter, if possible, that though the prayers have a welcome with God, and find gracious reception in heaven, yet that this be not believed by the saint on earth, but that he gives them up for lost and looks no more after them. Now though this be not a total and final miscarriage of the prayer, yet the devil hath hereby a great advantage, depriving him of the present comfort and benefit which his fight might pay him in before a return is made of his prayer.

[Satan would hinder the success of the saints' prayers, by getting them to be such as would be unwelcome with God.]

First way of Hinderance. Satan endeavours to hinder the welcome of the saints' prayers with God, that they may be cast as a petition out of court which God will not look on. He labours to hinder even the entertainment of our prayers in heaven. Now our prayers may several ways be stopped at heaven's door, and denied that gracious access which God useth to give. I speak now of saints' prayers. As for the prayers of the wicked, there is one law for them all—to be cast over the bar and the door shut upon them. The tree must be good before the fruit it bears can be sweet on God's palate. Now the stoppage which the saint's prayer meets withal, springs not from any unwillingness in God to give out his mercy, or any dislike to have beggars at his door. *Adeo placet Deo dare, ut propter hoc omnia creavit, volebat enim habere quae et quibus dare—God is so delighted with acts of mercy, that therefore he made the world, and all in it, that he might have suitors to beg and alms to give those suitors.* But from ourselves we put the stones into the lock, which hinders the turning of prayer's key in it, and so indeed we shut the door of mercy upon ourselves. The devil himself could not immediately hinder a saint's welcome. He hath not such command of God's ear, did we not put words into his mouth, and help him to a charge against us. The lies which he, as a false accuser carries to God, shall not prejudice us in God's thoughts or make our prayers less acceptable; but if the accusation be true,

God will hear it, though he be a wicked spirit that tells the tale, and we his dear children of whom it is told. A father, when he hears of some wicked prank his child hath played, will chide and frown on him, though it be an enemy that told him of it. Now, to instance what miscarriages in a saint hinder their audience at the throne of grace. 1. When the thing prayed for is not according to the will of God. 2. When the end the saint aims at is not levelled right. 3. When with his prayer he joins not a diligent use of the means. 4. When some secret grudge is lodged in his heart against his brother. 5. When there is a want of faith.

[MISCARRIAGES in a praying saint which hinder his audience in heaven.]

1. Miscarriage. When the thing prayed for is not according to the will of God. We have not a liberty to pray at random for what we will. The throne of grace is not set up that we may come and there vent our sudden distempered passions before God, or make any saucy motion to him that comes in our head. Truly then God would have work enough. If we had promised to sign all our petitions without any regard to the subject-matter of them, he should too oft set his hand against himself, and pass that away which would be little for his glory to give. Herod was too lavish when he gave his minion leave to ask what she would, even to half of his kingdom. And he paid dearly for it; he gave her that head which was more worth than his whole kingdom—for the cutting off his head lost him his crown. No, we have to do with a wise God, who, to stop the mouth of all such bold beggars, that would ask what unbeseems us to desire, or him to give, hath given a law of prayer, and stinted us to the matter thereof: 'When ye pray, say, Our Father,' &c. That is, learn here what you may pray for in faith to receive. 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us,' *I John 5:14.*

Faith, without a promise, is like a foot without any firm ground to stand upon. It was well Luther interpreted himself, when he said, *fiat voluntas mea—my will be done—mea, Domine, quia tua—my will, Lord, because thine.* Now, the promise contains this will of God. Be sure thou gatherest all thy flowers of

prayer out of this garden, and thou canst not do amiss. But take heed of mingling with them any wild gourd of thine own. Remember the check our Lord gave his disciples when venting their vindictive passion in their prayer: ‘Wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?...And he said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,’ Luke 9:54, 55. They had here an example to countenance their act. But that heroicus impetus, and extraordinary spirit by which Elijah and other of the prophets were acted, is not our standing rule for prayer. That came in them from the Spirit of God, which in us may proceed from the spirit of the devil, which is implied in our Saviour’s question, ‘Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.’ As if he had said, ‘You little think who stirred you up. You had your coal, not from God’s altar, but from Satan’s furnace.’

O! let us beware that we be not the devil’s messengers in going to God upon his errand; which we do when we pray against the rule or without a warrant. Belch not out thy unruly passions of anger there, presently to have thine enemies confounded—the disciples’ case; nor vent thy intemperate sorrow through impatience—as Job in the paroxysm of his trouble begs of God to take away his life in all haste. Take counsel of the word, and ‘let not thy lip be hasty to utter a matter before the Lord.’ Daniel’s method was the right, Dan. 9:2. First, he goes to the Scripture and searches what the mind of God was concerning the time when he had promised his people a return out of their captivity, which having found, and learned thereby how to lay his plea, then away he goes to besiege the throne of grace. ‘And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer,’ &c., ver. 3. Art thou sick or poor?—in want of any temporal mercy? Go and inquire upon what terms these are promised, that thy faith may not jet beyond the foundation of the promise by a peremptory and absolute desire of them, for then thy building will fall, and thou be put to shame, because thou askest more than God ever promised.

2. Miscarriage. Though the subject-matter of a saint’s prayer be bottomed on the word, yet if the end he aims at be not levelled right, this is a second door at which his prayer will be stopped, though it pass the former. ‘Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask a-

miss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.’ Take, I confess, a Christian in his right temper, and he levels at the glory of God. Yet as a needle is touched with a lodestone may, being shaken, be removed from its beloved point, to which nature hath espoused it, though trembling till it again recovers it; so, a gracious soul may, in a particular act and request, vary from this end, being jogged by Satan, yea disturbed by an enemy nearer home, his own unmortified corruption. Truly he is a rare archer that ever hits the white. Do you not think it possible for a saint, in distress of body and spirit, to pray for health in the one, and comfort in the other, with too selfish a respect had to his own ease and quiet? Yes sure, and to pray for gifts and assistance in some eminent service, with an eye asquint to his own credit and applause, to pray for a child with too inordinate a desire that the honour of his house may be built up in him—I know none so seasoned with grace as not to be subject to such warpings of spirit. And this may be understood as the sense, in part, of that expression: ‘If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me, but verily the Lord hath heard me,’ Ps. 66:18. For, to desire our own health, peace, and reputation, be not an iniquity—when contained in the banks that God hath set—yet, when they overflow, and are to such a height lift up as to overtop the glory of God, yea to stand but in a level with it, they are a great abomination. That which in the first or second degree is wholesome food, would be rank poison in the fourth or fifth.

Therefore, Christian, catechise thyself before thou prayest, O my soul, what sends thee on this errand? Know but thy own mind, what thou prayest for, and thou mayest soon know God’s mind how thou shalt speed. Secure God his glory, and thou mayest carry away the mercy with thee. Had Adonijah asked Abishag out of love to her person, and not rather out of love to the crown, it is like Solomon would not have denied the banns between them; but this wise prince observed his drift, to make her but a step to his getting into the throne, which he ambitiously thirsted for, and therefore his request was denied with so much disdain. Look that, when thy petition is loyal, there be not treason in thy end and aim. If there be, he will find it out.

Question. When shall I know that I aim at God or self in prayer?

Answer. This will commonly appear by the posture of our heart when God delays or denies the thing we pray for. A soul that can acquiesce, and patiently bear a delay or denial—I speak now of such mercies as are of an inferior nature, not necessary to salvation, and so not absolutely promised—gives a hopeful testimony that the glory of God weighs more in his thoughts than his own private interest and accommodation. A selfish heart is both peremptory and hasty. It must have the thing it cries for, and that quickly too, or else it faints and chides, falls down in a swoon, or breaks out into murmuring complaints, not sparing to fall foul on the promises and attributes of God himself. ‘Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not?’ Isa. 58:3. Now, from whence come both these, but from an overvaluing of ourselves? —which makes us clash with God’s glory, that may be more advanced by these delays and denials, than if we had the thing we so earnestly desire. God was more glorified in denying Christ himself his life, than if he had let that bitter cup pass without his tasting of it, which Christ, understanding fully, resigned himself thereunto, saying, ‘Father, glorify thy name; not my will, but thy will be done,’ John 12:28³. As if he had said, I would not save my life to lose thee the least of thy glory. This is the copy we should all write after. Indeed, if our distempered hearts be so wilful and hasty as not to be content with what, and that when it pleaseth God also, he should not love us in gratifying such desires, for thereby he would but nourish such distemper, which is better cured by starving than feeding it.

3. Miscarriage. The Christian’s prayer may miscarry when, with his prayer, he joins not a diligent use of the means. We must not think to lie upon God, as some lazy people do on their rich kindred; to be always begging of him, but not putting forth our hand to work in the use of means. God hath appointed prayer as a help to our diligence, not as a cloak for our sloth. Idle beggars are welcome neither to God’s door nor man’s. What! wilt thou lift up thy hands to God in prayer, and then put them in thy pocket?

3. Note: The actual quotation in the text appears to be a blending of John 12:28, and Matt. 26:39, 42.

— SDB

Doth not God forbid our charity to him that worketh not? ‘We commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat,’ II Thes. 3:10. And will he encourage that idleness in thee which he would have punished by us? It is a good gloss of Bernard upon that of Jeremiah, ‘Let us lift up our hearts with our hands unto God in the heavens,’ Lam. 3:41—qui orat et laborat, ille cor levat ad Deum cum manibus—he that prayeth, and is diligent in the use of means, is the person that lifts up his heart with his hands to God. Look therefore, Christian, thou minglest thy sweat with thy tears, thy labour with thy prayers. If thy prayer doth not set thee on work, neither will it set thy God at work for thee. Is it a lust thou art praying against? And dost thou sit down idle to see whether it will now die alone? Will that prayer slay one lust that lets another—thy sloth, I mean—live under its nose? As God will not save thy soul, so neither will he destroy thy sin, unless thy hand also be put to the work. See how God raised Joshua from off the earth, where he lay praying and mourning for Israel’s defeat, Joshua 7:10, 11: ‘Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned,’ &c.; ver. 12, ‘Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies,’ &c.; ver. 13, ‘Up, sanctify the people.’

O how oft may God rouse us up from our knees, and say, ‘Why lie ye here with your lazy prayers? You have sinned in not taking my counsel and obeying my orders. I bade you watch as well as pray; why do you not one as well as the other? My command obliges you to flee from the snare that Satan lays for you, as well as pray against it: therefore it is you cannot stand before your lusts.’ Moses durst not go to God with a prayer in behalf of sinning Israel till he had shown his zeal for God against their sin, and then he goes and speeds; see Ex. 32:25, compared with ver. 31. Dost thou think to walk loosely all day, yielding thyself, and betraying the glory of the God, into the hands of thy lust, and then mend all with a prayer at night? Alas! thy cowardice and sloth will get to heaven before thy prayer, and put thee to shame when thou comest on such an errand.

4. Miscarriage. The saint’s prayer may miscarry from some secret grudge that is lodged in his heart against his brother. Anger and wrath are strange fire to put to our incense. It is a law writ upon every gate

of God's house—every ordinance, I mean—at which we are to enter into communion with God, that we must 'love our brethren.' When we go to hear the word, what is the caveat, but that we should 'lay aside all malice, envy, and evil-speaking, and as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word?' The gospel will not speak peace to a wrathful spirit. Anger and malice, like a salt corroding humour in the stomach, makes us puke and cast up the milk of the word, that it cannot stay with us for nourishment. Is it the gospel supper thou sittest at? This is a love-feast, and though it may be eaten with the bitter herbs of sin's sorrow, yet not with the sour leaven of wrath and malice. 'When ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you,' &c., I Cor. 11:18. Now mark what follows, 'this is not the Lord's supper,' ver. 20. Christ will not communicate with a wrangling jangling company. When such guests come, he riseth from his own table, as David's children did from Absalom's upon the murder of their brother Amnon, II Sam. 13:29. And for prayer, you know the law thereof, 'Lift up holy hands, without wrath and doubting,' I Tim. 2:8—implying, that it is impossible to pray in faith and wrath. *Duobus modis oratio impeditur, si ad hoc homo mala committit aut si committenti in se ex toto corde non dimittit*—our prayer may be hindered two ways—by lying in any sin we commit against God; or, in wrath, by not forgiving our brother's committed against us. Those two in our Lord's prayer cannot be divorced—'forgive us, as we forgive.' This is that ferrum in vulnere—iron in the wound, as the same father hath it, which makes our prayers as ineffectual to us, as the plaster is to the wound in which the bullet still remains.

Now, the reason why God is so curious in this point, in because himself is so gracious; and being 'love,' can bid none welcome that are not 'in love.' The heathens had such a notion that the gods would not like the sacrifice and service of any but such as were like themselves. And therefore to the sacrifices of Hercules none were to be admitted that were dwarfs. To the sacrifice of Bacchus, a merry god, none that were sad and pensive, as not suiting their genius. An excellent truth may be drawn from this their folly. He that would like and please God must be like to God. Now our God is a God of peace, our heavenly Father merciful; and therefore to him none

can have friendly access but those that are children of peace, and merciful as their Father is. O! watch then thy heart, that Satan's fireballs—which upon every little occasion he will be throwing in at thy window—take not hold of thy spirit, to kindle any heart-burning in thee against thy brother. If at any time thou seest the least smoke, or smeltest the least scent of this fire in thy bosom, sleep not till thou hast quenched it. Be more careful to lay this fire in thy heart aside, when thou goest to bed, than the other that is on thy hearth. How canst thou by prayer commit thyself into God's hands that night wherein thou carriest a spark thereof smothered in thy breast? *Irasci, hominis, iram non preficere, Christiani est* (Jerome)—as a frail man thou canst not hinder but such a spark may light on thee, yet if thou wilt prove thyself a Christian, thou must quench it. Nay more, if thou wilt show thyself a Christian, and have thy prayer find God's ear or heart open to it, thou must do thy utmost to quench it in thy brother's heart as well as thy own. It is not enough that thou carriest peace in thy heart to him, except thou endeavourest that he may be at peace with thee also. 'If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee,' Matt. 5:23.

Hierome brings in the Christian here expostulating his cause with God, why he will not hear his prayer: *Domine, quare nonvis suscipere munus meum? quid ad me attinet? non est in meâ potestate, si frater meus habet aliquid contra me*—'What is it to me, Lord, that my brother is offended with me? I cannot help that; wilt thou not receive my gift for his fault?' To whom he brings God thus answering—*Et quid dicis male serve? Intelligo animum tuum? Nihil habes? Amas eum? Quare ergo salvare eum nonvis? Vade, roga eum, ne ille contra te habeat ut salvare possit*—'What is it, naughty servant, that thou sayest? I understand thy meaning. What is it to thee? Hast thou nothing against him? Dost thou love him? Wherefore then wouldst not thou save his soul? Go and beg of him to be at peace with thee, that thy brother's soul may be saved.' I speak the more of this particular, being sensible of what an hour, or rather age, of temptation we live in, by reason of the sad differences of judgment among Christians, which have distilled upon their affections so great a distaste one to another as exulcerates them into wrath and bitter-

ness; yea, a wonderful cure it will be, if it can be prevented from ending in an irrecoverable consumption of love among a great part of this generation—especially considering what malignity is dropped into these church-contentions by those national divisions also that have fallen in with them, and which drew so sad a sword among us, as for many years could find no other sheath but the bowels of this then miserable nation. O what grudges, animosities, and heart-burnings have these two produced! The sword, blessed be God! is at last got into its scabbard of peace; but have we not cause to wish it had been cleaner wiped when put up, and not such an implacable spirit of revenge and malice to be found remaining among many of us, as, alas! is too common to be met with everywhere? The storm without us is over, blessed be God! but is t not too high within some of our breasts? The flood of national calamities is assuaged; but now the tide is down and gone, is there not a deal of this filth—to name no other—uncharitable jealousies, bitterness, wrath, and revenge, left behind upon our hearts? Enough to breed another plague and judgment among us if a flood of national repentance does not wash away what the sea of war and other confusions have cast up! But, if this were all the mischief they are like to do us, our case is sad enough; they will hinder our prayers. For God will not accept such sacrifices as are kindled with the fire of wrath.

5. Miscarriage. The Christian's prayer may miscarry for want of faith. Prayer is the bow, the promise is the arrow, and faith the hand which draws the bow, and sends this arrow with the heart's message to heaven. The bow without the arrow is of no use, and the arrow without the bow as little worth; and both without the strength of the hand, to no purpose. Neither the promise without prayer, nor prayer without the promise, nor both without faith, avails the Christian anything. So that what was said of the Israelites, that they 'could not enter Canaan because of unbelief;' the same may be said of many of our prayers, they cannot enter heaven with acceptance, because they are not put up in faith. Now faith may be considered with a respect to the person praying, or to the prayer put up.

[What it is to pray in faith.]

First Requisite. The person must be a believer. But this is not enough.

Second Requisite. There must be an act of faith exerted in the prayer, as well as the habit of faith dwelling in the person. 'What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them,' Mark 11:24. If the thing be not to be found in the promise that we desire, it is a sin to pray for it; if it be, it is a sin not to believe, when we pray for it, and that no small one, because thereby we both profane and ordinance and asperse the name of the great God.

Question. But what is it to pray in faith?

Answer 1. Negatively. It is not to believe that the very thing in specie—or in its proper kind, that we pray for, shall be always given. Christ prayed in faith and was heard, Heb. 5. He believed not the thing in kind to be given neither was it; yet his prayer was answered. Therefore, be sure thou learnest the right method of acting thy faith in prayer, which must be taken from the nature of the promise thou puttest in suit. As water receives its figure—round or square—from the vessel it is poured into; so our faith is to be shaped by the promise. If that be absolute—as things necessary to salvation are—then thy faith may expect the very thing promised; if otherwise, then thou art not to limit thy faith to the thing itself, but expect money or moneyworth; health, or as good as health; deliverance, or better than deliverance. An absolute faith on a conditional promise—without an immediate revelation, which we must not look for—is fancy, not faith. To commit a sin, not act a grace, this is to be free on God's purse without a grant; for we put more in the conclusion of our faith than is in the premises of the promise; and this is as bad divinity as logic.

Answer 2. Positively. To pray in faith is to ask of God, in the name of Christ, what he hath promised, relying on his power and truth for performance, without binding him up to time, manner, or means.

(1.) We must ask what God hath promised, or else we choose for ourselves and not beg; we subject God's will to ours, and not ours to his; we forge a bond and then claim it as debt, which is a horrible presumption! He that is his own promiser must be

his own paymaster.

(2.) To pray in faith is required that we pray in Christ's name. As there can be no faith but on a promise, so no promise can be claimed but in his name, because they are all both made to him and performed for him. They are made to him, the covenant being struck with him: 'In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began,' Titus 1:2. And there was none then existing but Christ to whom the promise could be made. So that, as the child claims his estate in right of his father that purchased it; so we come to our right in the promise, as heirs of and co-heirs with Christ. And as the promise was made to him, so it is performed for him, because his blood shed was the condition of the obligation upon which God acknowledged the debt to Christ, and bound himself to perform all the articles of the covenant to his heirs' orderly claiming them at his hands in his name. It is not therefore enough boldly to urge God with a promise: 'Pardon, Lord, for thou hast promised it; grace and glory, for thou hast promised them;' but we must, if we mean to lay our plea legally—I mean according to the law of faith—plead for these under the protection of his name. Thus Daniel, that holy man, laid the stress of his prayer on Christ: 'Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake,' Dan. 9:17.

(3.) To this praying in faith is required a relying on God, through Christ, for a gracious answer. Let the former be done, and the creature fail in this, he prays not in faith, but takes the name of God and Christ in vain. This act of relying is the taking hold on God in prayer, Isa. 64. When mariners in a storm cast out their anchor, and it comes home again without taking hold on the firm ground, so as to stay the ship and bear it up against the violence of the waves, it gives them no help. So neither doth a handless prayer that takes no hold on God. Therefore you shall find that when a Christian speeds well in prayer, his happy success is attributed, not to naked prayer, but as clothed and empowered with this act of recumbency upon God. 'They cried unto the Lord,' II Chr. 13:14. Now see, 'The children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the Lord God of their fathers,' ver. 18. He doth but lie in prayer that doth

not rely on God after praying. What he seems to give with one hand to God he takes from him with another, which is no better than a mocking of God. By praying we pretend to expect good from him; by not relying we blot this out and declare we look for no such matter.

Now this reliance of the soul hath a twofold way whereby it fastens on God like the anchor's double hook.

(a.) It takes hold on the power of God. Thus Christ in his agony 'offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death,' Heb. 5:7. In prayer we open our case to God, declare how sinful, weak, shiftless creatures we are, and then we commit our cause to God. Now as none will put that to another's keeping which he thinks safe in his own hands; so neither will any deliver it to another whose ability he is not first persuaded to effect that which himself is unable to do. See Eliphaz's counsel to Job, 'I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause,' Job 5:8. As if he had said, 'If I were in your case I will tell you what course I would take, I would not look this way or that, but speedily haste me to the throne of grace, and when once I had told God my very heart, I would trouble myself no more, but commit my cause to him, and discharge my heart of the burden of all its troublesome thoughts.' But under what notion would he do all this? The next words will tell us, 'Unto God would I commit my cause, which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number.' First he would bottom his faith on God as able to do great things; and then, leaving his request lodged in the arms of such power, he doubted not but he should cast all care away and enjoy the serenity of his mind whatever his condition was. Indeed, this is the first stone faith lays in her building. And an error in the foundation will make the whole house stand weak. Be sure, therefore, thou layest this bottom stone with thy greatest care. O how unbecoming is it to have a great God, and a little faith on this great God!—a strong God, and a weak faith on his almighty power! Unbelief here ravisheth and offereth violence to the very light of nature, for 'his eternal power and Godhead' are known by 'the visible things' of the creation, Rom 1:20. What is not he able to do that could make so goodly a fabric without ma-

terials, tools, or workmen? Crucifige illud verbum potest ne?—obliterate that word ‘Is he able?’ Away with the question which so grates the ears of the Almighty: Can he pardon? Can he purge? What cannot he do that can do what he will?

(b.) It takes hold on the faithfulness of God to perform the promise. We are directed, in committing ourselves to him, to eye his faithfulness: ‘as unto a faithful Creator,’ I Peter 4:19. The saints’ faith hath been remarkable in staying themselves on this, while yet the mercy they prayed for lay asleep in its causes: ‘Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed,’ Ps. 65:1. See, he stands with his instrument strung and tuned, ready to strike up and bring God in with the music of his praise when he shall come with an answer to his prayer, not the least doubting but that he shall use it upon that joyful occasion; for he speaks without ifs and ands—‘Unto thee shall the vow be performed, O thou that hearest prayer!’ And yet that good day was not come; for even then he cries out, ‘Iniquities prevail against me!’ So, ‘I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor,’ Ps. 140:12. Why? how comes he so confident? ‘Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name,’ ver. 13. As if he had said, ‘Thou hast a name for a gracious and faithful God in thy promise, and this thou wilt never suffer to be blotted by failing thy word.’ Christian, thou mayest venture all thou art worth on the public faith of heaven. ‘His words are pure as silver tried seven times in a furnace.’ He that will not suffer a liar or covenant-breaker to set foot on his holy hill, will much less suffer any one thought of falseness or unfaithfulness to enter into his own most holy heart.

Question. But how may I know when I thus act faith in prayer?

[Four rules whereby to know if we act faith in prayer or no.]

(1.) Rule. We may know if we have acted faith by the serenity and composure of our spirits after prayer. Faith may live in a storm, but it will not suffer a storm to live in it. As faith rises, so the blustering wind of discontented troublesome thoughts go down. In the same proportion that there is faith in the heart

there is peace also. They are joined together, ‘quietness and confidence,’ Isa. 30:15: ‘In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.’ Therefore called ‘peace in believing,’ Rom. 15:13. Even where it is weakest it will not let the unquietness of the heart pass without a chiding. ‘Why art thou disquieted, O my soul! trust still in God,’ Ps. 42:5, 11. What! soul no sooner off thy knees, but clamorous! Hast not thou made thy moan to a God able to help thee, and will not that ease thee? Faith disburdens the soul in prayer of that which oppresses it; whereas the unbelieving soul still carries about it the cause of its trouble, because it had not strength to cast forth its sorrows, and roul its cares upon God in the duty. Christian, dost thou carry away the same burden on thy back from prayer which thou didst bring to it? surely thou didst want faith to lift it off thy shoulder. Had faith been there, and that been active and lively, it would have bestowed this elsewhere, and brought thee away with a light heart: as Hannah, who rose from praying ‘to eat, and her countenance was no more sad;’ and as Christ, who kneeled down with as sorrowful a heart as ever any, but comes off with a holy courage, to go and meet his approaching death, and his bloody enemies now on the way to attack him. ‘Rise,’ saith he to his disciples, ‘let us be going, behold he is at hand that doth betray me,’ Matt. 26:46. May it not put us to the blush to think that we could come less satisfied from God’s presence than we do sometimes from a sorry man’s? If you were poor, and had a rich friend that bids you send your children to him, and he will provide for them; would not this ease your mind of all your cares and distracting thoughts concerning their maintenance? And doth not God promise more that this comes to when he bids us ‘be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God?’

(2.) Rule. Dost thou continue praying even when God continues to deny? An unbelieving heart may have some mettle at hand, but will be sure to jade in a long journey. Faith will throw in the net of prayer again and again, as long as God commands and the promise encourageth. The greyhound hunts by sight, when he cannot see his game he gives over running; but the true hound by scent, he hunts over hedge and ditch though he sees not the hare he pursues all the

day long. An unbelieving heart, may be, drawn out, upon some visible probabilities and sensible hopes of a mercy coming, to pray, but when these are out of sight his heart fails him; but faith keeps the scent of the promise and gives not over the chase.

(3.) Rule. Dost thou stint God, or canst thou trust him to answer thy prayer in his own way without thy prescription? When we deal with a man whose ability or faithfulness we have in doubt, then we labour to make sure of him by tying him up to our terms. But if we stand assured of their power and truth, we leave them to themselves. Thus the patient sends for the physician, desires his help, but leaves him to write his own bill. The merchant sends over his goods to his factor, and relies on him to make such returns as his wisdom tells him will come to the best market. Thus the believing soul, when he hath opened his heart to God in prayer, resigns himself to the goodness, wisdom, and faithfulness of God to return an answer: ‘Remember me, O my God,’ said Nehemiah, ‘concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy,’ Neh. 13:22. See here, this good man makes bold to be God’s remembrancer, but dares not be his counsellor or prescriber. He remits the shaping of the answer to ‘the greatness of his mercy.’ Hence it follows, that whatever way God cometh in, the believing soul bids him welcome.

Doth he pray for health, and miss of that? yet he blesseth God for support under sickness. Doth he pray for his children, and they notwithstanding prove a cross? yet he finds an answer another way, and satisfies himself with it. After many a prayer that David had put up no doubt for his family, we find him entertaining an answer to those prayers with a composed spirit, though they came not in at the fore door, but having mercy in the letter: ‘Though my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant,’ &c.; and this, he tells us, is ‘all his desire,’ II Sam. 23:5. Indeed, a believer cannot miss his desires, ‘He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him,’ Ps. 145:19. Because they disown those desires which dash with God’s will. Who could pray more fervently for their children than Job did for his? He was with God for them every day; but, after all his religious care of them, he meets with heavy tidings, and hears them to be made a sacrifice by death for whom he had offered up so many sacrifices to God;

yet he doth not foolishly charge God, or say it was in vain that he prayed: no, that ointment was not lost the savour whereof was poured into his own soul, from the posture of which we might read a gracious answer, in the supporting grace that enabled him to love and bless God over the gravestone of his slain children.

(4.) Rule. By the soul’s comporting itself towards the means used for obtaining the mercy prayed for.

(a.) If thou prayedst in faith, it will set thee to use other means besides prayer. Mark how the apostle joins these together, ‘Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer,’ Rom. 12:11, 12. As faith useth her wings of prayer to fly to heaven; so she useth her feet of duty and obedience, with which she walks and bestirs herself on earth.

(b.) Faith will make thee, as use means, so to be choice of the means thou usest for the obtaining what thou bespeakest of God in prayer. Faith is a working grace, but it will be set on work by none but God. Am I in God’s way, saith faith? Is this the means he hath appointed? If it be not, away he turns from it, disdaining to work with any of the devil’s tools. God can never answer my prayer, saith the believer, without the help of my sin. If riches be good for me, I need not be at the cost to purchase them with a lie or a cheat. If health be a mercy, he can send me it, though I advise not with the devil’s doctors. If joy and comfort, there is no need to take down the devil’s music. If times be evil, he can hide me without running under the skirt of this great man and that by base flattery and dissimulation. When Ezra had committed himself and his company to God—now on their march towards Jerusalem—by a solemn day of fasting and prayer, and had made a holy boast of his God, what he would do for them that seek him, he thought it unbeseeming his professed faith, and also dishonourable to his God, whom he had so magnified in the hearing of the Persian king, to beg armed troops for a convoy to them in their way, lest his faith should be brought into suspicion for an empty bravado and groundless confidence: ‘I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our

God is upon all them for good that seek him;' Ezra 8:22.

(c.) If thou actest faith in prayer, thy faith will not only make thee choice of the means thou usest, but curious and careful in using the means that God chooseth for thee. Thou wilt be afraid lest it should stand in God's light, by stealing thy confidence in him to trust in it. Faith will teach thee to use means as God's ordinance, but rely on God to bless it. While faith's hand is on the plow, her eye is to heaven. Annus non ager facit fructum—the influences of heaven, not the tillage of the husband, make it a fruitful year. Sometimes the physician appoints a powder to be taken in wine or beer. Now it is not the beer or wine that does the cure, but the powder, which they are only used to convey and carry into the stomach. Thus mercy is handed over to us by the blessing of God in the use of means, yet think not the means do it, but the blessing of God mingled with it and infused into it.

(d.) If thou actest faith in prayer, as thou wilt be careful to improve means when God provides them, so thou wilt not suspend thy faith when God denies them. The believing soul dares not trust to the means when he hath them, therefore he dares not distrust God when he wants them. Faith knows, though God useth means, yet he needs none. The sun and showers are the means he useth for the growth of the grass and herbs; yet he made these to grow out of the earth before there was sun or rain, Gen. 1:11. Ploughing and sowing are the ordinary means whereby man is provided with bread; but he fed Israel with bread without their pains and husbandry. Ships [are] the means to waft us over the seas; but God carried Israel through the Red Sea without ship or boat. May be times are hard, and thou art poor; thy charge is great, and thy coming in little; with the widow in the prophet, thou art making the last cake of the little meal that is left. To reason and sense thou must either beg, steal, or die. Canst thou now, upon praying to thy God, wait upon his promise which tells thee, 'verily, thou shalt be fed,' Ps. 37:3; and on his providence, which records his care of the sparrows on purpose to assure us he will much more provide for his children? Or, at least, dost thou chide thy heart for its distrustful fears after praying, charging it to hope in God, to whom thou hast made thy moan?

Truly, if thy heart hath not some hold on God after duty to stay it, more than before in this thy strait; either thou hast no faith, or if thou hast faith, thou didst not act it in that prayer. True faith will either expel these dejections of heart, or at least protest against them.

[Satan would hinder the success of prayers, by preventing the saint's belief that they were heard.]

Second Way of Hinderance. Now we come to the second stratagem that Satan useth to hinder the success of the Christian's prayer, which I called a partial hinderance or miscarriage thereof, when the prayer itself is not lost—which comes to pass only when it finds not acceptance with God—but when the Christian doth not believe on earth that his prayer is heard in heaven, though indeed it is. By his questioning thereof, however, he loseth the revenue of that present peace which otherwise would be paid unto him from the expectation of its certain return with a joyful answer. As a merchant that gives his ship for castaway, when indeed it is safe and richly laden (only stays for a fair wind); he not knowing or believing this, puts himself to as much trouble and sorrow as if it were in truth as he feared. Fancy and imagination, even when without ground and reason, are able to produce real effects and sad consequences in the minds of men. The false news of Joseph's death caused as much sorrow to old Jacob, yea more, than if he had seen him laid out, and had followed him to the grave. The jailer, from a fear his prisoners were gone, and he accountable for them, had foredone himself, by falling on his own sword, if Paul had not seasonably cried out, 'Do thyself no harm, for we are all here.'

And truly our unbelieving fears have no less power upon our hearts. They rob the Christian of the joy of his life—and man is but a sour piece of clay when that is gone. It is not praying, but believing prayer heard, that will make a glad heart and a cheerful countenance. Hannah often prayed; she was acquainted with the work many years, yet never had the burden of her spirit taken off till she had faith she should speed. Yea, moreover, they [unbelieving fears] weaken the spirit of prayer. He that expects little from prayer, will not be much in prayer. That

trade is best tended which it is hoped will pay a man best for his pains in it. ‘Who is there among you,’ saith God, ‘that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought,’ Mal. 1:10. The husbandman throws his seed freely, because he sows in hope; and his precious seed on his fattest soil, because there he looks to find it again with the greatest increase. This made David like praying work so well that he will never leave it: ‘I have prayed, and the Lord hath heard, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.’ As a merchant, finding his sweet gain come trouling in, converts his whole estate into stock; so David devotes himself wholly to prayer: ‘For my love they are my adversaries,’ *דָבִי הַמֶּלֶה*, Ps. 109:4, ‘but I was prayer.’ This was the only weapon I lift up for my defence against all their darts. Whereas, unbelief betrays the soul unto many uncomely thoughts of God, which reflect sadly upon his name, so as to weaken his reputation in the creature’s thoughts, and bring him either to a disuse of this duty, or hopeless performance of it, and this Satan loves alive. When a merchant thinks his goods miscarry, he grows presently jealous of his factor, questioning his care, faithfulness, or ability to despatch his business. Such whisperings we shall hear, if we listen to our unbelieving hearts sometimes, when our prayers make not so short an quick a voyage as we desire. It was a high charge that Job brought against God—though he lived to see he had little reason to do it; yea, afterward charged himself for charging God—I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not,’ Job 30:20. This holy man was now as deep in God’s books, and as great a favourite with him, as ever; yet so far had Satan wound into him, as to make him listen to those false reports which he brought unto him of God—taking the advantage of his present cloudy providence to colour his calumnies, insomuch that he began to give credit unto this liar. Now if this may become a stone of offence to Job, how much more mayest thou fear dashing thy foot against it? Let it be thy care to countermine Satan in this his spiteful plot against God and thee. Surely it should not be a little matter that makes thee throw up thy prayers, and give away so rich an adventure as thou hast swimming in this bottom. Esau hath the brand of a ‘profane person,’ for so cheaply parting with his

inheritance. If thou beest a believer, thou art an heir of promise, and, amongst promises, this is not the least—that what thou askest in Christ’s name, believing, thou shalt receive. Now, it is too like Esau’s profaneness to part with this piece of thy heritage—which thou canst not do without impeaching the faithfulness of God that gave thee an estate in the promise.

We highly commend Job for his heroic resolution at another time: ‘God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me,’ Job 27:5. How much more shouldst thou say to Satan, ‘God forbid that I should justify thee, thou wicked fiend, or thy false charge against my God; I will hold fast his integrity and faithfulness till I die.’ Surely Daniel, who ventured his life rather than not pray, would have parted with a thousand lives rather than have given is prayers for lost, and thereby have blotted the good name of God, whose faithfulness stands bound to return every prayer of faith with a gracious answer into the saint’s bosom.

But, the more to fortify you against this design of Satan, let us inquire into a few of those arguments with which Satan—abusing the Christian’s credulity—leads him into this temptation, if not absolutely to conclude, yet unbelieving to dispute and question it in his heart, whether his prayer be heard or no. I shall reduce them to three heads. First. The first argument by which he scruples the Christian, and nourishes his unbelieving fears, is taken from those sinful infirmities that cleave to his person and prayer. Second. Another argument is taken from the deportment of God to him in and after prayer. Third. The last is taken from the common providence of God, that dispensest the same things to the wicked without praying, which the saints receive praying.

[SATAN’S ARGUMENTS to make the believer doubt whether his prayer is heard.]

Argument 1. The first argument by which Satan would make the Christian out of love with himself and his duty, is taken from those sinful infirmities cleaving to both—his person and prayer alike. Thereby he would quash the saint’s hope of any favourable reception that his prayer hath found in heaven. What! thy stammering prayers make music in God’s ear!

Will the Lord foul his fingers with thy besmeared duties? If thou wert a Samuel or Daniel, and couldst claim thy place among those worthies that are renowned for the eminent service they have done God in their generation, then thou mightest hope to have the ear of God to thy suit; but thou, alas! art a puny stripling, a foward child, in whom there is more sin than grace to be found, and dost thou think to be heard? Truly, though this argument weighs little, having no countenance from the tenor of the covenant, whose privileges are not impropriated to a few favourites, more eminent in grace than theirbrethren, but stand open to the whole family—it being ‘a common salvation,’ and ‘like precious faith,’ that all the saints partake of; yet it is the great bugbear with which many of them are scared.

A word or two therefore to arm thee against this argument. Only this premised—which I must take for granted—that these sinful infirmities are lamented and not cockered by thee—that indeed would turn infirmity into presumption; as also that thou neglectest not to apply the most effectual means for their cure—though, as in hereditary diseases, all the physic thou takest will not here perfectly rid thee of them: this granted, for thy comfort know thy prayers are not so offensive to God as to thyself. Thy prayers pass such a refining in Christ’s mediation, that their ill scent is taken away.

Doth thy scruple arise from the sinful failings of thy daily conversation and Christian course? To remove this, observe how the Spirit of God, when he instanceth in Elias as a person whose prayers are exceedingly prevalent with God, doth not describe him by the transcendency of his grace above others, but by his infirmities like unto them: ‘Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not,’ James 5:17. As if God should say, Were I so curious in my scrutiny, as you fear, Elias’s prayer would have been stopped, for he was not without his infirmities. How many failings do we find in David’s unseemly carriage before Achish, for which he was turned out of the king’s presence under the notion of a madman? Yet his prayer at that time, when he betrayed so many unbelieving fears, found favour with God. ‘I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears,’ Ps. 34:4. Read the title, and you shall find

it, ‘A Psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed.’

Are they the sinful infirmities which escape thee in the duty of prayer? Canst thou find more in any prayer thou puttest up, than were in the disciples’, for one so short?—where they exercised so little faith that Christ calls it ‘no faith,’ Mark 4:40. ‘Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?’ Yea, they pray to Christ, and chide him in the same breath, ‘Master, carest thou not that we perish?’ Yet Christ could find sincerity hid, like Saul, in this stuff of their infirmities, and granted their request. It is true he rebuked them, but it is as true that he rebuked the wind also. God’s promise for hearing of prayer shall not be made void by the saint’s weakness in prayer. Yea, for thy further comfort, know, that the less power these have to shake or disturb thy spirit in expecting a gracious answer, the more kindly God will take it at thy hand. ‘Abraham,’ it is said, ‘believed, not considering his own body, or the deadness of Sarah’s womb;’ and for this was highly commended, because he thereby did signally glorify the power of God, to which he believed their bodily indisposition should not be any obstacle. Truly thus it will be highly pleasing to God, if thou canst rely—staggering not at thy spiritual indispositions, and that deadness of thy heart which rises up as a great objection in thy thoughts against the success of thy prayer; for by this thou givest Christ both the honour of his death, by which he purchased this free access for thy weak prayers to the throne of grace, and also of his intercession, which clarifies them from all their sinful mixtures.

Argument 2. Satan draws his argument from God’s deportment to the soul in and after prayer. In this argument there are three things he commonly insists upon—by them to create trouble to the Christian’s thoughts. (1.) His silence, which he would have the Christian interpret to be God’s slighting or disregarding of him and his prayer. (2.) His frowns, from which he would have him conclude neither he nor his duty are accepted. (3.) His not giving the mercy in kind; and this he tells the Christian amounts to a denial.

(1.) His silence after prayer. As wicked men sometimes sin, and God keeps silence, which makes them bold to think God approves of them and their way; so, sometimes a gracious soul prays, and God holds his peace here also; and the poor soul begins to fear that neither his person nor his duty are approved of God. Now Satan, knowing what thoughts are like to rise in the Christian's own heart, falls in and joins issue with the Christian's bosom enemy, labouring to confirm him in these his unbelieving fears.

To disentangle and help thee out of this brier, take these directions:—

(a.) Learn to distinguish betwixt God's hearing and his answering the saint's prayer. Every faithful prayer is heard, and makes an acceptable report in God's ear as soon as it is shot; but God doth not always speedily answer it. The father, at the reading of his son's letter—which comes haply on some begging errand—likes the motion; his heart closeth with it, and a grant is there passed; but he takes his own time to send his despatch, and let his son know this. Princes have their books of remembrance, wherein they write the names of their favourites whom they intend to prefer, haply some years before their gracious purpose opens itself to them. Mordecai's name stood in Ahasuerus' book some while before his honour was conferred. Thus God records the names of his saints and their prayers. 'The Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name,' Mal. 3:16. But they hear not of God in his providential answer, haply, a long time after. Abraham prays for a child, and is heard, but how many years interpose before he hath him in his arms? Truly so many that he goes into Hagar—partly by his wife's counsel and his own weakness—to obtain that with a by-blow for which God himself had undertaken.

Take heed, Christian, thou beest not led into this temptation, to question whether God hears thee, because thou hearest not from him presently. Be patient, and thou shalt find, the longer a mercy goes before its delivery, the more perfect it will come forth at last. God gave a speedy answer to Abraham for his

son Ishmael, 'O that Ishmael might live!' 'I have heard thee,' saith God concerning Ishmael, Gen. 17:20. Indeed he flourished and spread into a great nation before Isaac's stem almost budded. What a small number was the family of Jacob at their going down into Egypt! but when the date of God's bond was near expiring, and the time of the promise drew nigh, then God paid interest for his stay. None gain more at the throne of grace than those who trade for time, and can forbear the payment of a mercy longest.

(b.) Consider, when thou findest the deepest silence in God's providence concerning the thing prayed for, then thou hast a loud answer in the promise. Say not therefore, 'Who shall ascend to heaven, to bring thee intelligence whether thy prayer hath got safe thither, and had favourable audience in God's ear?' God himself hath saved thee this labour: the promise will satisfy thee, which assures thee that if it be duly qualified it can not find the heart of God shut against it. 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,' James 5:16. So assured have the saints been of this, that they, before any inkling from providence hath been heard—to bring them the news of a mercy coming—have taken up joy upon the credit of the naked promise, and feasted themselves with the hopes of what they expected, but had not yet received at the cost and charge of God's faithfulness, with which the promise is sealed, 'In God I will praise his word,' Ps. 56:4. Mark the phrase. He had not as yet the desired mercy, only a word of promise that it should come. Now, considering the power and truth of God the promiser, he is as merry as if he were put in possession of it, and pays his praises before God performs the promise.

(2.) The second thing which Satan gathers from God's deportment towards the Christian, thereby to bring the hearing of his prayer into question in his anxious thoughts, is, his frowns against the Christian. It cannot be denied but sometimes a dear saint of God may go away from duty with an aching heart, by reason of the sad impressions of an angry God left upon his spirit. And when thus it fares with the Christian, Satan's time is come, he thinks, to lead him into this temptation, by persuading him he may read what entertainment his prayer had at God's hands in the language of his countenance and his carriage towards him. If God, saith he, had heard thy

prayer, would he handle thee thus? No sure; he would rather have taken thee up into his arms, and kissed thee with the kisses of his mouth, than thus trample thee under is feet. Thou shouldst have had darts of love shot from his pitiful eye, to imitate the purposes of his grace, and not arrows headed with his wrath, to stick in thy soul, and thus drink up thy very spirits. Can these be the wounds of a friend?—this the deportment that means thee well? This was the temptation which ruffled Job's thoughts, and embittered his spirit, Job 9:17. He could not believe God answered his prayer, 'because he broke with his tempest.' As if God's mercy came always in the still voice, and never in the whirlwind! Now in this case take this double word of COUNSEL.

Counsel (a). Inquire whether this tempest comes to find any Jonah in thy ship; whether it takes thee sinning, or soaking in any past sin unrepented; or whether thy conscience, diligently listened to, doth witness that thou art sincere in thy course, though compassed with many failings. If it overtakes thee in a runaway voyage, with Jonah, or rambling course with the prodigal from thy father's house, then indeed thou hast reason to question, yea it is beyond all question, that an acceptable prayer in this posture cannot drop from thy lips. What! run from God, and then send to him thy prayers! This is to desire mercy to spend upon thy lust. But if, upon thy faithful search, thou findest this storm overtakes thee in the way of duty and exercise of thy sincerity, like the tempest that met the disciples at sea—when at Christ's command they launched forth—then be not discouraged. For it is ordinary with God to put on the disguise of an angry countenance, and to use rough language, when his heart is resolved upon ways of mercy, and mediates love to his people. Jacob, you know, wrestled hard and long before victory inclined to his side. And the woman of Canaan was kicked away like a dog with harsh language, who at last was owned of Christ for a dear child, and sent away to her heart's content. Sincerity needs fear no ill from God. This very consideration kept Job's head as another time above water, Job 16:12. There we find God taking him by the neck, shaking him as it were to pieces, and setting him up for his mark. But, ver. 17, this upheld his troubled spirit—that all this befell him walking in obedience—'Not for any injustice in mine hands: also

my prayer is pure.' Wherefore he rears up his confidence, 'Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high. My friends scorn me: but mine eye poureth out tears unto God,' ver. 19, 20. The holy man was not, for all this, scared from the throne of grace, but still looked on God, though with tears in his eyes, expecting good news at last after so much bed. And we have warrant to do the same. 'If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God,' 1 John 3:21. And this brings me to the second word of counsel I have to give thee.

Counsel (b). Inquire whether under these frowns from God there be yet a spirit of prayer working in thee. Haply thou canst not deny but that thy heart is rather stirred up from these to lament after the Lord with more restless sighs and groans, to pray with more feeling and fervency, than driven away from duty. The spirit of prayer upheld in thee may assure of these two things:—

[1.] That the cloud of anger which seems to sit on God's brow is not in his heart. It is but a thin veil, through which thy faith might see the working of his bowels towards thee. The presence of the Spirit of God at work thus in a soul cannot stand with his real anger. If his wrath were up, this in thee would be down. Thou shouldst have him soon calling back this his ambassador of peace, at least suspending and withdrawing his assistance. When that sad breach was made between God and David in the matter of Uriah, David's heart was presently out of tune; his 'right hand had forgot its cunning,' and the spirit of prayer had received a sad damp in his heart. Where is the psalm to be found that was penned by David in that interregnum, as I may so say, of his grace? I do not say he did never pray all the time he lay soaking in that sin; but those prayers were not fit to be joined with the holy breathings of that spirit which acted him before his fall and after his recovery. And therefore, good man, when by repentance he came to himself, like one recovering out of a dangerous sickness—which had for a time taken away his senses—he begins to feel himself weak, and how much the Spirit of grace was by his sin enfeebled in him, which makes him so vehemently beg that God would 'renew a right spirit in him,' and 'not take his Holy Spirit from him,' Ps. 51:10, 11. The Spirit is so choice and peculiar a mercy, that if thou canst find lively actings of his

grace in thee—and where are they more sensibly felt than in prayer, helping the soul to sighs and groans which cannot be uttered?—thou canst not in reason think God is not friends with thee, though it were at present as dark as midnight with thy soul.

[2.] It may assure thee that his ear is open to thy cry when his face is hid from thine eye. For, consider but who this Spirit is that thus helps thee in prayer, and furnisheth thee with all thy spiritual ammunition with which thou so pliest and batterest the throne of grace. Is he not one that knows the mind of God? and that would not have a hand in that petition which should not be welcome to heaven? Having therefore this assistance from the Spirit, doubt not thy acceptance with the Father. In a word, the Spirit that helps thee to thy groans and sighs in prayer is no other than that God thou prayest to; and will God deny himself? This I conceive part, if not the principal part, of the scripture's meaning, 'I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain,' Isa. 45:19. That is, whenever I stir up a soul to pray, and empower him with my Spirit to perform it feelingly, fervently, and after a holy manner, it is always to purpose. God never said thus to any, 'Seek ye me in vain.'

(3.) The third thing from which Satan takes his advantage to breed scruples in the Christian's mind concerning the acceptance of his prayer, is the denial of mercy in kind which is prayed for. We are prone enough to have such thoughts ourselves, and Satan will not be wanting to feed any bad humour that is stirring in us. Or, if our hearts seem pacified with this dealing of God, he hath his ways and wiles to conjure up this evil spirit of discontent and unbelief. On this errand he sent Job's wife, to make him think and speak evil of God: 'Dost thou still retain thy integrity?' As if she had said, 'What! art thou at thy old work?—still praying and praising God? Dost thou not see how much he regards thee, or thy serving of him? What hast thou got by all thy devotion? Is not thy estate gone?—thy children slain and buried in one grave, and thyself left a poor loathsome cripple?—thy life serving for nothing but to make thee feel thy present misery and feed on thy past crosses?'

Indeed, it requires a good insight into the nature of the promises, and the divers ways God takes to fulfil them, to enable us to spell an answer out of a denial of the thing we pray for. Yet, such a 'good under-

standing have all they that do his commandments,' Ps. 111:10. They can clear God and justify his faithfulness in all his dealings, though, when he comes to answer their prayers, he chooseth not to enter in at that door which they set open in their own thoughts and hopes for him, nor treads in the very steps of their express desires. The whole psalm contains a testimony given to the faithfulness of God in his providential works, at which, though a carnal cursory eye—from the mysteries hid therein—is scandalized and takes offence, yet the gracious soul, by his more curious observance of and inquiry into them, finds a sweet harmony between them and the promise, and therefore concludes, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.' They, having a key to God's character, can read the hand of his providence, and so are able to praise him—knowing him faithful—when others are ready to curse him.

But, to help thee out or keep thee from falling into this temptation, thou art in the first place to consider what mercy it is that God denies thee. Is it not of that sort of blessings which are not necessary unto thy happiness as a saint? Such all temporal mercies are. The kingdom of God consists not in meat and drink. Thou wilt find an absolute denial forno other; he hath bid us take no denial for his love and favour, grace and glory: 'Seek the Lord, and his strength: seek his face evermore,' Ps. 105:4—that is, be not put off for these, but live and die at God's door till he brings this alms to thee. Well, we will take this for granted it is a temporal mercy thou art denied. Now, when thou art tempted to question the love of God, or acceptance of thy prayer, let me desire thee to weigh this THREEFOLD CONSIDERATION.

Consideration (a). Consider how ill God may take this at thy hand; and that in a double respect. [1.] That thou dost suspect his love on so slight and trivial a matter as the temporal enjoyments of this life are, which he thinks are not worth enough to be put into the promise any otherwise than they are subservient to the spiritual and eternal blessings of the covenant: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you,' Matt. 6:33—that is, as you need them. He casts them into the other more grand blessings, as a tradesman would do thread or paper, or a skein of silk, into

a parcel of rich commodities that a customer buys of him. Suppose a child should ask his father for money to buy some toy or trifle that pleaseth his green head, but the father denies him the thing. If, now, the child should go and make proclamation in the open street, to the disgrace of his father, that his father did neither love nor regard him—though he wants neither food nor raiment—would this be well taken at the child's hand? This thou dost, Christian, in this case, though thou thinkest not so much; and hath not thy heavenly Father more reason to question thy love for taking away his good name, than thou to suspect his for his denial? But again, [2.] He may take it ill that thou hast aspersed his wisdom. Is there no way but this for the wise God to show his love and answer thy prayer? Cannot he deny health and give patience?—take away thy estate and turn it into contention?—teaching thee to be abased, and to bless God thou art made low. He that will make thee so happy in heaven, where few of this world's enjoyments shall be seen, cannot he make thy life comfortable on earth without some of them?

Consideration (b). Consider how thou prayedst when thou didst meet with this denial. Didst thou pray peremptorily and absolutely, or conditionally, with submission to the will of God? If peremptorily, thou wert beside the rule, and art the cause why thy prayer came back without its errand. God will not hear, or bear, commanding prayers. He that must have a temporal mercy, if he gets it, he may have a spiritual curse, but is sure to have a temporal cross. So Delilah proved to Samson, who would not take his parents' counsel, but must have her whatever comes of it: 'Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well,' Judges 14:3. But he paid dearly for his choice. May be such an employment pleaseth thee well. Thy carnal heart is in love with it; and that sets the a praying inordinately for it. Alas! poor creature, if thou hadst it, what wouldst thou do with it? Thou wouldst fondly lay thy head in its lap and let it rock thy grace asleep, and then betray thee into the hand of some sin and judgment! But, if thou sayest that thou prayedst with a submissive spirit, on condition it liked God as well as thyself; if so, why then dost thou now recant thy prayer, seeing God hath declared his will that it is not good for thee to have thy desire? Wilt thou not be determined by him to whom thou didst refer thyself?

Hast thou not reason to think that God takes the best way for thee? There is never a prayer put up but God doth, as it were, weigh and ponder it, and then his love sets his wisdom on work to make such a return as may be most for his own glory and his child's good. Now, it being the product of such infinite wisdom and love, thou oughtest to acquiesce in it, yea to praise God for it. Thus did David in a great strait, 'O my God, I cry in the daytime, and thou hearest not,' Ps. 22:2. Well, what hears God from him now he hears nothing from God (as to the deliverance prayed for)? No murmuring nor cavilling at God's proceedings —nay, he hears the quite contrary; for he justifies and praises God, 'But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel,' ver. 3.

Consideration (c). Observe whether thou canst not gather something from the manner of God's denying the thing prayed for, which may sweeten it to thee. Haply thou shalt find he denies thee, but it is with a smiling countenance, and ushers it in with some expression of grace and favour that may assure thee his denial proceeds not from displeasure. As you would do with a dear friend, who, may be, comes to borrow a sum of money of you—lend it you dare not, because you see plainly it is not for his good. But, in giving him the denial, lest he should misinterpret it, as proceeding from want of love and respect, you therefore preface it in with some kind of language of you hearty affection to him, as that you love him, and therefore deny him, and shall be ready to do for him more than that comes too. Thus God sometimes wraps up his denials in such sweet sugared intimations of his love as prevent all jealousies from arising in the hearts of his people. When David was denied to build a temple for God, as was in his heart to do, God gave him a large testimony of his affection, how highly he accepted his good-will therein. Though he should not build a temple for him, yet his desire was so kindly taken that God would build a house for him that should last forever.

Thus, sometimes a faithful minister prays earnestly that God would bless his labours to the converting of his people, and is denied; yet intimations of God's love to his person are dropped, with a promise that, however, 'his reward is with the Lord.' So that his prayer, though denied as to them, is returned with peace into his own bosom. Another prays passionate-

ly, ‘O that I might see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, and that truth and peace might flourish in his days!’ This, may be, is not granted, because his desire antedates the period which God hath fixed in his purpose for the fulfilling of his promise to his church: but he withal manifests his love to him, and expresseth how highly he resents⁴ his love to the church. Thus God did by Daniel, to whom an angel was sent to let him know what kind entertainment his prayer had, and that he was a man ‘greatly beloved of God,’ Dan. 9:21. So in temporal mercies. Haply thou art pleading with God for deliverance out of this trouble and that affliction, and it is denied thee, but a message [is] with the denial that recompenseth it double. May be some sweet illapses of his love he drops into thy bosom, or assurance of seasonable succours that shall be sent in to enable thee to charge through them with faith and victory. So God dealt by Paul, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee.’ I hope now thou wilt not say thy prayer is lost. When Saul sought his father’s asses, was he not shrewdly hurt to find a kingdom instead of them? The holy women that went to the sepulchre to anoint the body of Jesus with their spices, did not lose their labour though they found him risen. Were they, thinkest thou, sorry for that? What are all the enjoyments of the world to the spiritual mercies and comfort of the promises which thou findest in thy attendance on God? Not so much as the dead body of our risen Saviour. Thou findest not some dead creature-comfort, but thou meetest with embraces from a living God.

Argument 3. The third and last thing that Satan abuseth the Christian with, to make him doubtful of the acceptance of his prayer, and also to question, when a mercy is given in after prayer, whether it comes as a gracious answer to it or no, is taken from the common providence of God, that dispenseth the same things to the wicked without praying which the saints receive praying. Now, with Satan, how knowest thou that thy mercies come to thee as an answer to thy prayer, and not at the door of common provi-

dence with them? For the extricating thee out of this snare thou must know, that we are not to expect the extraordinary ways to determine this, but must satisfy ourselves with what light the word of God affords, which is able to resolve, not only this, but all our cases of conscience. It is true that God doth sometimes cast in some such circumstances as bring an evidence with them that the mercy flies to us on the wings of prayer. As when, upon Abraham’s servant’s praying at the well for God’s gracious conduct and help to despatch his master’s business prosperously, that Rebecca should presently come forth, and, by her kind carriage and invitation, so fitly answer the mould of his prayer, even as the lock doth the key made for it. Here heaven declared to his very sense, that his prayer found the right way to heaven. When, upon prayer, the mercy is thus cast in strangely and suddenly without the concurrence of second causes—yea, when they all lie under a visible sentence of death, and the thing is put beyond the activity of their sphere to work—here there is no rival to stand in competition with prayer. Thus, when the apostles healed the sick upon a short prayer darted up to heaven—not so much as a doctor’s advice asked in the cure. When Peter knocked at the door where the church was praying for him, what but prayer bound his keeper’s senses so fast in the chains of sleep, and made those with which Peter was bound to fall off without any kind hand to help, but heaven’s? What made the iron gate so officious to open to him that had no key in his hand to unlock it? Surely we must confess, prayer opened heaven door, and heaven, at the church’s prayer, opened the prison door.

Yet it is as true, that more commonly mercies that are won by prayer come not with this pomp and observation. But, as converting grace oft steals into the hearts of some with less terror and noise of humiliation than it doth into others; so, truly, do answers in prayer—and that more commonly—come with more silence, and in the ordinary road by the concurring help of second causes. As, the Christian praying for the temporal provisions of this life, God answers his prayer by blessing his diligence in his calling. The sick Christian praying, hath his food and physic thoroughly sanctified, and so recovers. Now, though God hath left himself at liberty, either to send his mercies by secondary hands, or, when he pleaseth,

4. NOTE: — Could it be that this is a typo here and that what was meant was the word respects? or, represents? or, presents? While that would not clear up the entire tenor of this paragraph, which seems fraught with problems, it would help to alleviate them to a certain extent. — SDB

to be the messenger himself, and bring them in an extraordinary way with his immediate hand; yet hath he not left us at liberty to leave the ordinary road, and neglect the means, under a pretence of expecting extraordinary ways to have our desires. Now as to this ordinary way of giving in mercies in answer to prayer, these two things are to be inquired for:—

(1.) Inquire whether thou who didst put up the prayer beest in a covenant state. When God gives a mercy in answer to prayer, he is said to ‘remember his covenant,’ Ps. 105:34 compared with ver. 8, and to be ‘mindful of his covenant,’ Ps. 111:5. His eye is first on the person, taking notice who he is, whether his child or no, and then his ear is open to his cry: ‘The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry,’ Ps. 34:15. ‘Who art thou, my son?’ said Isaac to Jacob, before he gave him the blessing. If God sees thou art not his child—and his eyes are not dim, like old Isaac’s, that he can be deceived—thy prayer is not accepted. Indeed, neither canst thou, in that state, pray in a gospel sense, nor God graciously bid thy prayer welcome; for the spirit of prayer is a covenant grace, and interest in the mediation of Christ a covenant privilege, without both which no prayer is accepted. God hears not any that have not his Spirit to pray in them, and his Son to pray for them; and none have these but such as are in a covenant state.

(2.) Inquire what thy frame of heart was in the duty of prayer, and also after its performance. Thy not being in a covenant state will prove thy prayer was not heard, and consequently that the mercy received came not as a gracious answer to it; but thy being in a covenant state is an insufficient ground for thee to conclude that this particular prayer that now thou puttest up is accepted, because there may intervene something to hinder the present benefit of this privilege which is annexed to thy covenant state. For, though thy state be good, yet thy present frame and behaviour may be naught. Thou mayest, though a child of God, be under fresh guilt and defilement as yet unrepented of. Now in this case God can shut his door upon his own child. Thou hast indeed *jus in re*, but not *aptitudinem ad rem*—as a saint, thou hast a

right to all the promises of the covenant, and to this, of having God’s ear open to thy prayers among the rest; but as thou art a saint under guilt, or the defilement of any sin that thou hast not yet repented of, thou art not fit to enjoy what thou hast a right to as a saint. God doth not disinherit thee indeed, but he sequesters the promise from thee, and the rents of it shall not be paid to thee, till thou renewest thy repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus for the pardon of it. Thy God will choose a fitter time than this is to signify his love to thee. The leper under the law was to stand off while purified; and so will thy God turn his back of thy prayer, till thou beest cleansed of thy sin.

Again, suppose thou art a saint, and hast not thus defiled thyself with any gross sin, yet thy graces might not be exercised in the duty of prayer; haply thou didst pray, but no faith or fervency were exerted in it. There may be grace in the heart, but none in the duty; and such a prayer shall not speed. The promise is to the saint acting his faith and fervency in prayer. ‘The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availleth much,’ James 5:16. ‘Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart,’ Jer. 29:13.

Lastly, Though thouwert stirred up in prayer, yet may be thy heart was not raised up to rely on God after prayer for the answer. Then we pray in faith when we so take hold of God by faith in prayer, as to wait and stay ourselves on God for a return of mercy from him. Now by putting all these together, thou mayest come to the resolution of the question in hand. If thou beest in a covenant state, and liest not in any known sin unrepented of—if thou prayest fervently, and acitest faith on God, so as to stay thy soul upon God for an answer, though accompanied with many weaknesses and staggerings—truly thou mayest, without presumption, conclude the mercy which finds thee in this orderly manner waiting upon God comes in a gracious answer to thy prayer. We do not fear to break open a letter when we find our name in the superscription directing it to us. Search the promises, and thou shalt find them directed by name to thee who prayest thus.