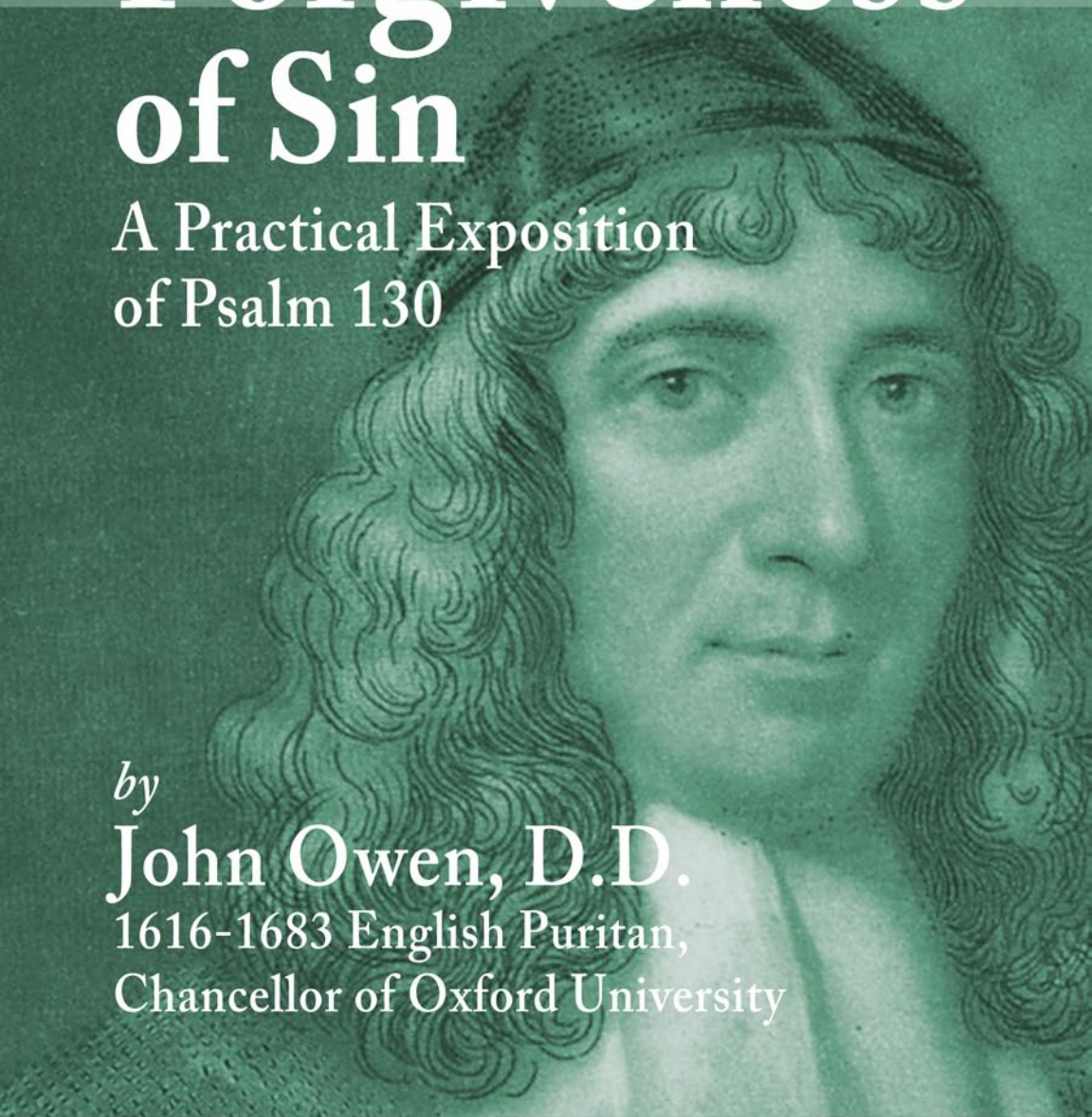
The Forgiveness of Sin

A Practical Exposition of Psalm 130



by

John Owen, D.D.

1616-1683 English Puritan,
Chancellor of Oxford University

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"The Forgiveness of Sin, A Practical Exposition of Psalm 130," by John Owen, D.D., is here reprinted by Hail & Fire, 2009.

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John Owen, D.D.
1616-1683**,** English Puritan Preacher, Chancellor of Oxford University

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PREFACE

to the Protestant Reprint of

"The Forgiveness of Sin, A Practical Exposition of Psalm 130," by John Owen, D.D.

by Hail & Fire

PROTESTANT SERMONS & EXHORTATIONS

In this age of ecumenism, when the lines have been blurred between the two major denominations and the world itself speaks of the Pope as head of all Christians, we join with so many to call to remembrance the truth of the Gospel and of those who, in times past, both well-known and unknown, answered a good answer for a pure and Gospel faith against the traditions of men. The intention of Hail & Fire is to make available Gospel and Reformed Theology in the works, sermons, exhortations, prayers, and apologetics of those who have maintained the Gospel and expounded upon the Scripture as the Eternal Word of God and the sole authority in Christian doctrine.

THE

FORGIVENESS OF SIN:

ILLUSTRATED

IN A PRACTICAL EXPOSITION

OF

PSALM CXXX.

BY JOHN OWEN, D.D.

FOR SOME YEARS CHANCELLOR OF OXFORD UNIVERSITY.

PUBLISHED BY THE

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In the revision of this work for the present edition, a few sentences implying denominational peculiarities have been omitted.

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PREFATORY NOTICE,

AND

SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR'S LIFE.

The following Treatise, which by many spiritual christians has been considered the best of Dr. Owen's works, is here divided into chapters, with heads indicating the subject of each, and showing at a glance in the Table of Contents the author's train of thought; numerous repetitions in announcing his subdivisions are also omitted, and obsolete terms and phrases, in many cases, exchanged for others.

It is recorded in reference to the origin of this work, that a young man, who afterwards became a minister of Christ, being under religious impressions, came to Dr. Owen for counsel. In the course of conversation the Doctor asked, "Pray, in what manner do you think to go to God?" "Through the Mediator, sir," said the young man. To which Dr. Owen replied, "That is easily *said*; but it is another thing to go to God through the Mediator, than what many who use the expression are aware of. I myself preached some years when I had but very little, if any, experimental acquaintance with access to God through Christ, until the Lord was pleased to visit me with sore affliction, by which I was brought to the mouth of the grave, and under which my soul was oppressed with horror and darkness. But God graciously relieved my spirit by a powerful application of Psalm 130: 4, '*There is Forgiveness with Thee* that Thou mayest be feared,' from whence I received special instruction, peace, and comfort in drawing near to God through the Mediator; and I preached thereupon immediately after my recovery." None who seriously and prayerfully read this Treatise will fail to discover the grounds and the appropriateness of the above appeal to an inquiring youth; the rich sources from which the author has drawn Divine instruction, and its adaptation to the wants of every perishing soul.

The great Owen was born at Stadham, Oxfordshire, England, in the year 1616, and died at Ealing, August 24, 1683, aged 67. He was contemporary with Bunyan, Baxter and Flavel, and shared in the bitter opposition they encountered for their non-conformity.

His father being a clergyman, he received an early education, and at twelve was admitted a student of Queen's College, Oxford, where he graduated with honor, and continued the pursuit of study till the age of twenty-one, when new laws and regulations were imposed on the University by Archbishop Laud, to which he could not

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conscientiously submit. He commenced his labors in the ministry a Fordham, whence they were transferred to Coggeshall, and early began to write in defence of the truth. In 1643 he published his treatise "The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished," showing the personal obligations of every believer to aid in spreading "the truth as it is in Jesus," and soon after a treatise founded on two short Catechisms for the benefit of the young. In 1646, being summoned to preach before Parliament, he boldly proclaimed the doctrines of the cross, and on numerous future occasions fulfilled the same duty with equal fidelity to God and the souls of men.

One of these sermons introduced him to Cromwell, who appointed him his chaplain; and in 1651 he was elected by Parliament to the deanery of Christ Church, Oxford, and soon after was appointed by Cromwell *Vice-Chancellor of that University*. He continued his connection with Oxford for nine years until the death of Cromwell, when he was displaced. During this period "the change in the circumstances, literature and piety of the University were truly astonishing." His labors were great almost beyond parallel, and as successful as arduous. He also, while at Oxford, often preached before Parliament, and wrote many valuable works, including his treatises on "Divine Justice," on the Socinian Controversy, the "Mortification of Sin in Believers," on "Communion with God," and on "Temptation."

In 1663 he was invited to settle as pastor of a church in Boston, the request being seconded by a respectful letter from the General Court of Massachusetts, and he was afterwards elected President of Harvard College, but he declined these invitations, and for several years ministered to a church in London. From the time of his leaving Oxford to 1676, he published no less than twenty-two different works, among which are the treatises on "Psalm 130," on "Indwelling Sin," on the "Trinity," the "Sabbath," the "Holy Spirit," and on "Apostacy."

At length his health declined, and he retired to Kensington, and from thence to Ealing, where he closed his days in writing his "Meditations on the Glory of Christ." On the morning of the day he died, a friend called to tell him the work was put to press. "I am glad to hear it," said the dying christian; and lifting up his hands and eyes, as if transported with joy, he exclaimed, "But, O! the long wished-for day is come at last, in which I shall see that glory in another manner than I have ever done, or was capable of doing in this world." His published works comprise twenty-eight large octavo volumes; the largest work being the Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, which occupied his attention for sixteen years.

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THE

FORGIVENESS OF SIN

ILLUSTRATED IN

PSALM CXXX.

Paraphrase of the Psalm, and Plan of the Work.

1. *Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord.*
2. *Lord, hear my voice, let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.*

O Lord, through my manifold sins and provocations I have brought myself into great distresses. My iniquities are always before me, and I am ready to be overwhelmed with them, as with a flood of waters; for they have brought me into depths wherein I am ready to be swallowed up. But although my distress be great and perplexing, I do not, I dare not utterly despond, and cast away all hopes of relief; nor do I seek unto any other remedy or means of relief, but I apply myself to thee, Jehovah, to thee alone. And in this my application unto thee, the greatness and urgency of my troubles make my soul urgent, earnest and pressing in my supplications. Whilst I have no rest, I can give thee no rest: O, therefore, attend and hearken unto the voice of my crying and supplications!

3 *If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?*

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It is true, O Lord, thou God, great and terrible, that if thou shouldest deal with me in this condition—with any man living—with the best of thy saints, according to the strict and exact tenor of thy law, which first re presents itself to my guilty conscience and troubled soul, there would be neither for me nor them the least expectation of deliverance; all flesh must fail before thee, and the spirits which thou hast made, and that to eternity; for who could stand before thee when thou shouldest so execute thy displeasure?

4. *But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.*

But, O Lord, this is not absolutely and universally the state of things between thy Majesty and poor sinners; thou art, in thy nature, infinitely good and gracious, ready and free, in the purposes of thy will, to receive them. And there is such a blessed way made for the exercise of the holy inclinations and purposes of thy heart towards them, in the mediation and blood of thy dear Son, that they have assured foundations of concluding and believing that there is pardon and forgiveness with thee in the way of thine appointment. This way, therefore, will I, with all that fear thee, persist in: I will not give over, leave thee, or turn from thee, through my fears, discouragements and despondencies; but will abide constantly in the observance of the worship which thou hast prescribed, and render the obedience which thou dost require, having great encouragement so to do.

5. *I wait for the Lord; my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.*

And herein, on account of the forgiveness that is with thee, O Lord, do I wait with all patience, quietness and perseverance. In this work is my whole soul

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engaged; even in an earnest expectation of thy approach unto me in a way of grace and mercy. And for my encouragement therein hast thou given me a blessed word of grace, a faithful word of promise, wherein my hope is fixed.

6. *My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.*

Yea, in the discharge of this duty my soul is intent upon thee, and in its whole frame turned towards thee; and that with such diligence and watchfulness in looking out after every way and manner of thy appearance, of thy manifestation of thyself, and coming unto me, that I excel therein those who, with longing desire and earnest expectation, wait and watch for the appearance of the morning; and that either that they may rest from their night-watches, or have light for the duties of thy worship in the temple, in which they most delight.

7. *Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.*
8. *And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.*

Herein have I found such rest, peace and satisfaction to my own soul, that I cannot but invite and encourage others to take the same course with me. Let, then, all the Israel of God, all that fear him, learn this of me, and from my experience: Be not hasty in your distresses; despond not, despair not, turn not aside to other remedies; but hope in the Lord; for I can now, in an especial manner, give testimony to this, that there is mercy with him suited to your relief. Yea, whatever your distress be, the redemption that is with him is so bounteous, plenteous and unsearchable, that the undoubted issue of your performance of this duty will

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be, that you shall be delivered from the guilt of all your sins, and the perplexities of all your troubles.

My design in the ensuing treatise is to illustrate the teaching of the Holy Ghost in this Psalm, as expressing, in the experience of the Psalmist and the working of his faith, *the state of a soul in itself greatly perplexed —relieved through Divine grace—and acting towards God and his saints suitably to the displays of that grace:* a great design and full of great instruction. To be more particular, we have

THE STATE OF THE DISTRESSED SOUL. "*Out of the depths* have I cried unto thee, O Lord."

HIS APPLICATION TO GOD ALONE FOR RELIEF. "*Lord, hear my voice*, let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications."

HIS DEPRECATION OF GOD'S JUSTICE. "If thou, Lord, *shouldest mark iniquities*, O Lord, who shall stand?"

THE RELIEF FOUND IN GOD'S MERCY. "But *there is forgiveness with Thee*, that thou mayest be feared."

THE ACTING OF HIS FAITH TOWARDS GOD. "*I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I trust.* My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning, I say more than they that watch for the morning." And

The acting of his faith TOWARDS THE SAINTS. "*Let Israel* hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

The Lord, in mercy, so dispose of these meditations, that both he that writes and they that read may be made partakers of the benefit, relief and consolation intended for his saints, in this psalm, by the Holy Ghost.

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CHAPTER I.

THE SOUL IN THE DEPTHS OF SIN.

The state of the soul here represented, as the basis on which this psalm is built, and which first claims our consideration, is described in the expression, OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

Some of the ancients, as Chrysostom, suppose this expression to relate to the depths of the heart of the Psalmist; but the obvious sense of the place, and the constant use of the word in the Hebrew, will not admit of this interpretation: it is in the plural number, depths. It is commonly used for valleys, or any deep places whatever, but especially of waters. Valleys and deep places, because of their darkness and solitariness, are accounted places of horror, helplessness, and trouble. Psalm 23 : 4, "When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death;" that is, in the extremity of danger and trouble.

The moral use of the word, as expressing the state and condition of the souls of men, is metaphorical. These depths, then, are difficulties, or pressures, attended with fear, horror, danger, and trouble. And they are of two sorts:

Providential, in respect to outward distresses, calamities, and afflictions, "Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul." Psalm 69 : 1. In the Hebrew, "I stick in the mire of the deep, and there is no standing; I am come into the depths of waters, and the flood overflows me." It is trouble, and the extremity of it, that the Psalmist thus expresses. He was brought by it into a condition like a man ready to be drowned: being cast into the bottom of deep and miry waters,

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where he had no firm foundation to stand upon, nor ability to come out; as he further explains himself, verse 15.

There are also *internal* depths, depths of conscience on account of sin. "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps." Psalm 88 : 6. What he intends by this expression the Psalmist declares in the next words, ver. 7, "Thy wrath lieth hard upon me." Sense of God's wrath upon his conscience, on account of sin, was the deep he was cast into; so, ver. 15, speaking of the same matter, he saith, "I suffer thy terrors;" and ver. 16, "Thy fierce wrath goeth over me:" which he calls water, waves, and deeps; according to the metaphor already explained.

And these are the deeps that are here principally intended. Augustine says on the place, "He cries out under the weight and waves of his sins." This the ensuing psalm makes evident. Desiring to be delivered from these depths out of which he cried, he deals with God wholly about mercy and forgiveness; and it is *sin* alone from which forgiveness is a deliverance. The doctrine also that he preaches, upon his delivery, is that of mercy, grace, and redemption, as is manifest from the close of the psalm; and what we have deliverance by, is most upon our hearts when we are delivered.

It is true, indeed, that these deeps do often concur; as David speaks, "Deep calleth unto deep," Psalm 42 : 7. The deeps of affliction awaken the conscience to a deep sense of sin. But sin is the disease, affliction only a symptom of it; and in effecting a cure, the disease itself is principally to be heeded, the symptom will follow, or depart of itself.

This, in general, is the state of the soul, as described in this psalm, and is as the key to the ensuing discourse, or the hinge on which it turns. Hence we deduce these two propositions:

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Gracious souls, after much communion with God, may be brought into inextricable depths and entanglements on account of sin.

The inward root of distresses is principally to be attended to in all pressing trials: our sin, as the cause of our afflictions.

It is a sad truth that we have proposed for consideration: he that hears it ought to tremble in himself, that he may rest in the day of trouble; it speaks out the apostle's advice, "Be not high-minded, but fear;" Rom. 11 : 20. And "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." 1 Cor. 10 : 12. When Peter had learned this truth by woful experience, after all his boldness and forwardness, he gives this counsel to all saints, "that they would pass the time of their sojourning here in fear," 1 Pet. 1 : 17; knowing how near, in our greatest peace and serenity, evil and danger may lie, even at the door.

Some few instances of the many that are left on record, wherein this truth is exemplified, may be mentioned. "Noah was a just man, perfect in his generation, and Noah walked with God." Gen. 6 : 9. He did so a long season, and that in an evil time, amidst all sorts of temptations, "when all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." This gave an eminency to his obedience, and doubtless rendered the communion which he had with God, in "walking before him," most sweet and precious to him. He was a gracious soul, upon the undoubted testimony of God himself. But we know what befell this holy person. He that shall read the story recorded of Noah, (Gen. 9 : 20,) will easily grant that he was brought into inextricable distress on account of sin. His own drunkenness, ver. 21, with the consequences of it, provoked the unnatural conduct of his son, ver. 22; and this leads him to the de-

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voting of that son and his posterity to destruction, ver. 24, 25; all which, joined with the sense of God's just indignation, from whom he had newly received that tremendously miraculous deliverance, must overwhelm him with sorrow and anxiety of spirit.

The matter is more clear in David. Under the Old Testament, none loved God more than he, and none was loved of God more than he. The paths of faith and love wherein he walked are, to the most of us, like the way of an eagle in the air, too high and hard for us; yet to this very day do the cries of this man after God's own heart sound in our ears. Sometimes he complains of broken bones, sometimes of drowning deeps, sometimes of waves and water-spouts, sometimes of wounds and diseases, sometimes of wrath and the sorrows of hell—every where of his sins, the burden and trouble of them. Some of the occasions of his depths, darkness, entanglements and distresses we all know. As no man had more grace than he, so none is a greater instance of the power of sin, and the effects of its guilt upon the conscience. But instances of this kind are obvious, and occur to the thoughts of all, so that they need not be repeated. I shall show, then,

What is intended by the depths into which gracious souls, after much communion with God, may fall.

Whence it comes to pass that they may so fall; and

What sins usually bring them into great spiritual distresses, with some aggravations of those sins.

I. What are *some of the depths into which believers may fall.*

1. *Loss of the sense of the love of God*, which the soul formerly enjoyed. There is a twofold sense of the love of God, of which believers in this world may be made partakers. There is the transient acting of the heart by the Holy Ghost, with ravishing joys, in apprehension

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of God's love, and our relation to him in Christ. This, or the immediate effect of it, is called "joy unspeakable, and full of glory." 1 Pet. 1 : 8. The Holy Ghost shining into the heart, with a clear evidence of the soul's interest in all Gospel mercies, causes it to leap for joy, to exult and triumph in the Lord; as being for a season carried above all sense and thought of sin, self, temptation, or trouble. But as God gives the bread of his house unto all his children, so these dainties and high cordials he reserves only for the seasons and persons, wherein, and to whom, he knows them to be needful and useful. Believers may be without this sense of love, and yet be in no depths.

Again, there is an abiding sense of God's love upon the hearts of those of whom we speak, who have long had communion with God, consisting in a prevailing Gospel persuasion that they are accepted with God, in Christ. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Rom. 5 : 1. This is the root from whence spring all that peace and ordinary consolation of which believers in this world are made partakers. This is that which quickens and enlivens them to duty, Psalm 116 : 12, 13, and is the salt that renders their sacrifices and performances savory to God and refreshing to themselves. This supports them under their trials, gives them peace, hope and comfort in life and death. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." Psalm 23 : 4. A sense of God's presence in love is sufficient to rebuke all anxiety and fears; and not only so, but to give, in the midst of them, solid consolation and joy. So the prophet expresses it, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will

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joy in the God of my salvation." Habak. 3: 17, 18. And this is that sense of love which the choicest believers may lose on account of sin. This is one step into their depths. They do not retain such gospel-apprehension of it, as to give them rest, peace, or consolation; to influence their souls with delight in duty, or to support in trials.

2. Perplexed thoughtfulness about their great *unkindness towards God*, is another part of the depths of sin-entangled souls. So David complains, "I remembered God, and was troubled." Psalm 77: 3. How came the remembrance of God to be a matter of trouble to him? In other places he professes that it was all his relief and support: how comes it to be an occasion of his trouble? All had not been well between God and him; and whereas formerly, in his remembrance of God, his thoughts were chiefly exercised about his love and kindness, now they were wholly engrossed with his own sin and unkindness: this causes his trouble. Herein lies a share of the entanglements occasioned by sin. Saith such a soul in itself: "Foolish creature! hast thou thus requited the Lord? Is this the return that thou hast made to him for all his love, his kindness, his consolations and mercies? Is this thy love to him? Is this thy kindness to thy friend? Is this thy boasting of him, that thou hadst found so much goodness and excellency in him and his love, that though all men should forsake him, thou never wouldst do so? Are all thy promises, all thy engagements, which thou madest unto God in times of distress, upon prevailing obligations, and mighty impressions of his good Spirit upon thy soul, now come to this, that thou shouldst so foolishly forget, neglect, despise, cast him off? Well! now he is gone, he has withdrawn from thee, and what wilt thou do? Art thou not even ashamed to desire him to return?" Thoughts of this nature cut Peter to the heart, upon his fall. The

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soul finds them cruel as death, and strong as the grave. It is bound in their chains, and cannot be comforted. Psalm 38 : 3, 4, 5, 6. And herein consists a great part of the depths inquired after. For this consideration excites and puts an edge upon all grieving, straitening, perplexing affections, which are the only means whereby the soul of a man may be inwardly troubled, or trouble itself: such are sorrow and shame, with that self-displeasure and self-revenge wherewith they are attended. And as their reason and object in this case transcend all other occasions of them, so on no other account do they cause such severe and perplexing reflections in the soul as on this.

3. A revived sense of *justly-deserved wrath* belongs also to these depths. This is as the opening of old wounds. When men have passed through a sense of wrath, and have obtained deliverance and rest through the blood of Christ, to come to their old thoughts again, to be dealing afresh with hell, curse, law, and wrath, is a depth indeed! And this often befalls gracious souls on account of sin. Psal. 88 : 7. "Thy wrath lieth hard upon me," says the Psalmist; it pressed and crushed him sorely. There is a self-judging as to the desert of wrath which is consistent with a comforting persuasion of an interest in Christ. In that the soul finds sweetness, as it lies in a subserviency to the exaltation of grace; but in this case the soul is left under it without that relief It plunges itself into the curse of the law and flames of hell, without any cheering support from the blood of Christ. This is walking in "the valley of the shadow of death." The soul converses with death, and what seems to lie in a tendency thereunto. The Lord also, to increase his perplexities, puts new life and spirit into the law; gives it a fresh commission, as it were, to take such a one into its custody; and the law will never, in this world, be wanting to its duty.

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4. There are also oppressing *apprehensions of temporal judgments;* for God will judge his people; and judgment often begins at the house of God. Though God, saith such a one, should not cast me off for ever, though he should pardon my iniquities, yet he may so take vengeance of my inventions as to make me feed on gall and wormwood all my days. "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments." Psalm 119 : 120. He knows not what the great God may bring upon him; and having a full sense of the guilt of sin, which is the ground of this whole condition, every judgment of God is full of terror to him. Sometimes he thinks God may lay open the vileness of his heart, and make him a scandal and a reproach in the world. "Oh!" saith he, "make me not the reproach of the foolish." Psalm 39 : 8. Sometimes he trembles, lest God should strike him suddenly with some signal judgment, and take him out of the world in darkness and sorrow; so saith David, "Take me not away in thy wrath." Sometimes he fears lest he should be like Jonah, and raise a storm in his family, in the church whereof he is a member, or in the whole nation: "let them not be ashamed for my sake." These things make his heart soft, as Job speaks, and to melt within him. When any affliction or public judgment of God is joined to a quick living sense of sin in the conscience, it overwhelms the soul, whether it be only justly feared, or be actually inflicted, as was the case of Joseph's brethren in Egypt. The soul is then rolled from one deep to another. Sense of sin casts it on the consideration of its affliction; and affliction turns it back on a sense of sin. So deep calleth unto deep, and all God's billows go over the soul; and they do each of them make the soul tender, and sharpen its sense unto the other. Affliction softens the soul, so that the sense of sin cuts the deeper, and makes the larger wounds; and the sense of sin weakens

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the soul, and makes affliction the heavier, and so increases its burden. In this case, that affliction which a man in his usual state of spiritual peace could have embraced as a sweet pledge of love, is as goads and thorns in his side, depriving him of all rest and quietness. God makes it as thorns and briers, wherewith he will teach stubborn souls their duty, as Gideon did the men of Succoth.

5. There may be added prevailing *fears, for a season, of being utterly rejected* by God, of being found a reprobate at the last day. Jonah seems to conclude so, chap. 2 : 4. "Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight:" I am lost for ever, God will own me no more. And Psalm 88 : 4, 5, "I am counted with them that go down into the pit: free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more, and they are cut off from thy hand." This may reach the soul, until the sorrows of hell compass it, and lay hold upon it; until it be deprived of comfort, peace, and rest; until it be a terror to itself, and be ready to choose strangling rather than life. This may befall a gracious soul on account of sin. But yet, because this wars directly against the life of faith, God doth not, unless in extraordinary cases, suffer any of his to lie long in this horrible pit, where there is no water, no refreshment. But it often occurs, that even the saints themselves are left for a season to a fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation, as to the prevailing apprehension of their minds.

6. God secretly *sends his arrows into the soul*, that wound it, adding pain to its disquietness. "Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore." Psalm 38 : 2. Ever and anon, in his walking, God shot a sharp piercing arrow, fixing it on his soul, that wounded and perplexed him, filling him with pain and grievous vexation. These arrows are God's rebukes.

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"When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity." Psalm 39 : 11. God speaks in his word, and by his Spirit in the conscience, things sharp and bitter to the soul, fastening them so that it cannot shake them off. These Job so mournfully complains of, chap. 6 : 4. The Lord speaks words with such efficacy that they pierce the heart quite through; and what the issue then is, David declares, "There is no soundness," saith he, "in my flesh, because of thine anger; nor is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin." Psalm 38 : 8. The whole person is brought under the power of them, and all health and rest is taken away. And,

7. *Dullness and disability to duty*, in doing or suffering, attend such a condition. "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up." Psalm 40 : 12. His spiritual strength was worn away by sin, so that he was not able to address himself to any communion with God. The soul now cannot pray with life and power; cannot hear with joy and profit; cannot do good and communicate with cheerfulness and freedom; cannot meditate with delight and heavenly-mindedness; cannot act for God with zeal and liberty; cannot think of suffering with boldness and resolution; but is sick, weak, feeble and bowed down.

Now, I say, a gracious soul, after much communion with God, may, on account of sin, by a sense of the guilt of it, be brought into a state wherein some or all of these, with other like perplexities, may be its portion. And these make up the depths whereof the Psalmist here complains. I shall now show,

II. WHENCE IS IT *that believers may be brought into depths on account of sin.*

The nature of THE COVENANT OF GRACE, wherein all believers now walk with God, and wherein lies their whole provision for obedience, leaves it possible for

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them to fall into these depths that have been mentioned. Under the first covenant there was no mercy or forgiveness provided for any sin. He made man upright, and it was necessary that he should be preserved from every sin, or that covenant could in no way benefit him. But it is not so in the covenant of grace: there is in it pardon provided in the blood of Christ. It is not, therefore, of indispensable necessity that there should be administered grace in it, effectually preserving from every sin: yet it is on all accounts to be preferred before the other; for besides the relief by pardon, which the other knew nothing of, there is in it also much *provision against sin*, which was not in the other.

1. There is provision made in it *against all and every sin that would disannul the covenant*, and make a final separation between God and a soul that hath been once taken into it. This provision is absolute; God hath taken upon himself to make it good, to establish this law of the covenant, that it shall not by any sin be disannulled. "I will," saith God, "make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good, but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Jer. 32:40. This security depends not on any thing in ourselves. All that is in us is to be used as a means for the accomplishment of this promise; but the event or issue depends absolutely on the faithfulness of God. And the whole certainty and stability of the covenant depends on the efficacy of the grace administered in it to preserve men from all such sins as would disannul it.

2. There is in this covenant of grace provision made for *constant peace and consolation*, notwithstanding the guilt of such sins as, through their infirmities and temptations, believers are daily exposed to. Though they fall into sins every day, yet they do not fall into depths every day. In the tenor of this covenant there is a con-

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sistency between a sense of sin unto humiliation, and peace with strong consolation. After the apostle had described the whole conflict that believers have with sin, and the frequent wounds which they receive thereby, which makes them cry out for deliverance, Rom 7:24, he yet concludes, chap. 8:1, that there is no condemnation to them: which is a sufficient and stable foundation of peace. So, 1 John, 2:1, "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not; and if any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Our great business and care ought to be that we sin not; but yet, when we have done our utmost, "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." What then shall poor, sinful, guilty creatures do? Why, let them go to the Father, by their Advocate, and they shall not fail of pardon and peace. And, saith Paul, "God is abundantly willing, that we might have strong consolation, who fly for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us." Heb. 6:17, 18. What was his condition who fled of old to the city of refuge for safety, from whence this expression is taken? He was guilty of blood, though shed unawares; and so that he was to die for it, if he escaped not to the city of refuge. Though we may have the guilt of sins on which the law pronounces death, yet flying to Christ for refuge, God has provided not only safety, but strong consolation. Forgiveness in the blood of Christ not only takes guilt from the soul, but trouble also from the conscience; and in this respect the apostle at large sets forth the excellency of his sacrifice. Heb. 10. The sacrifices of the law, he tells us, could not make perfect the worshippers; which he proves, because they did never take away, thoroughly and really, conscience of sin, that is, depths or distresses of conscience about sin. But now, saith he, Jesus Christ, in the covenant of grace, hath "for ever perfected them that were sanctified;" provid

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ing for them such stable peace and consolation, that they should not need the renewing of sacrifices every day. This is the great mystery of the Gospel, in the blood of Christ, that those who sin every day should have peace with God all their days, if their sins fall within the compass of those infirmities against which this consolation is provided.

3 There is provision made of grace to *preserve the soul from great and enormous sins*, such as in their own nature are apt to wound conscience, and cast the person into depths in which he shall have neither rest nor peace. There is in this covenant, grace for grace, John, 1 : 16 ; and abundance of grace, administered from the fulness of Christ: grace reigneth in it, Rom. 6 : 6, destroying and crucifying the body of sin.

But this provision in the covenant of grace against peace-ruining, soul-perplexing sins, is not, as to the administration of it, absolute. There are covenant commands and exhortations, on the attendance upon which the administration of much covenant grace depends. To watch, pray, improve faith, to stand on our guard continually, to mortify sin, to fight against temptations with steadfastness, diligence, constancy, are every where prescribed ; and that in order to the insurance of the grace mentioned. So Peter informs us, the divine power of God "hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness." 2d Epistle, 1 : 3. We have from it an habitual supply and provision for obedience at all times: also, saith he, verse 4, "He hath given unto us great and precious promises, that by them we might be partakers of the divine nature."

What then, in this blessed estate and condition, is required of us, but that we may make a due improvement of the provision made for us, and enjoy the comforting influence of those promises that he holds out to us; ver. 5, 6, 7. "Giving all diligence, add to your faith,

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virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity:" that is, carefully and diligently attend to the exercise of all the graces of the Spirit, and to a conversation in all things becoming the Gospel. What then shall be the issue, if these things are attended to? ver. 8. "If these things be in you and abound, ye shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is not enough that these things be in you, that you have the root of them from the Holy Ghost, but you are to take care that they flourish and abound; without which, though the root of the matter may be in you, and so you be not wholly devoid of spiritual life, yet you will be poor, barren, sapless, withering creatures, all your days. But now, suppose that these things do abound, and we be made fruitful thereby, why then, saith he, ver. 10, "If you do these things ye shall never fall." What, never fall into sin? nay, that is not the promise; and he that says, when he hath done all, "that he hath no sin," he is a liar. Or is it, never fall totally from God? no, the preservation of the elect, of whom he speaks, from total apostacy, is not suspended on such conditions, especially not on any degree of them, such as their abounding imports. But it is, that they shall not fall into their old sins, from which they were purged, ver. 9, such conscience-wasting and defiling sins as they lived in, in the time and state of their unregeneracy. Thus, though there be in the covenant of grace, through Jesus Christ, provision made of abundant supplies for the soul's preservation from entangling sins; yet their administration hath respect unto our diligent attendance on the appointed means of receiving them.

And here lies the latitude of the new covenant;

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here lies the exercise of renewed free-will. This is the field of free, voluntary obedience, under the administration of gospel grace. There are extremes which, in respect to the event, it is not concerned in. To be wholly perfect, to be free from every sin, all failings, all infirmities, is not provided for, nor promised in this covenant. It is a covenant of mercy and pardon, which supposes a continuance of sin. To fall utterly and finally from God is provided against. Between these two extremes of absolute perfection and total apostacy lies the large field of believers' obedience and walking with God. Many a sweet heavenly passage there is, and many a dangerous depth, in this field. Some walk near to the one side, some to the other; yea, the same person may sometimes press hard after perfection, sometimes wander to the very border of destruction. Now, between these two lie many a soul-plunging sin, against which no absolute provision is made, and into which, for want of giving all diligence, believers often fall.

4. There is *not, in the covenant of grace, provision made of ordinary and abiding consolation, for any under the guilt of sins greatly aggravated, which they fall into by neglecting the condition of abounding grace just named.* Sins there are, which, either because in their own nature they wound and waste conscience, or in their effects break forth into scandal, causing the name of God and the Gospel to be evil spoken of, or in some of their circumstances are full of unkindness against God, do deprive the soul of its wonted consolation. How, by what means, on what account such sins came to terrify conscience, to break the bones, to darken the soul, and to cast it into inextricable depths, notwithstanding the relief that is provided of pardon in the blood of Christ, I shall not now declare. That they will do so, and that consolation is not of equal extent with safety, we know. Hence God assumes it to himself, as an act

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of mere sovereign grace, to speak peace and refreshment to the souls of his saints, in their depths of sin-entanglements. Isa. 57 : 18, 19. And indeed, if the Lord had not thus provided that great provocation should stand in need of special reliefs, it might justly be feared, that the negligence of believers might possibly produce much bitter fruit.

Only this must be observed by the way, that what is spoken relates to the sense of sinners in their own souls, and not to the nature of the thing itself. There is in the Gospel, consolation provided against the greatest as well as the least sins. The difference arises from God's sovereign communication of it, according to the tenor of the covenant's administration, which we have laid down. Hence, because under Moses' law there was an exception of some sins, for which there was no sacrifice appointed, so that those who were guilty of them could no way be justified from them; that is, carnally as to their interest in the judaical church and polity; Paul tells the Jews, "That through Jesus Christ was preached unto them the forgiveness of sins, and that by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." Acts, 13 : 38, 39. There is now no exception of any particular sins, as to pardon and peace; but what we have spoken relates to the manner wherein God is pleased to administer consolation to the souls of sinning believers.

Having shown that the covenant of grace leaves it possible that the souls of believers should fall into inextricable depths, I proceed more directly to show *whence it is that they often do actually thus fall.*

1. From *indwelling sin*, as it remains in the best of saints in this life. For,

Though the strength of every sin be weakened by grace, yet *the root of no sin is in this life wholly taken away.* Lust is like the stubborn Canaanites, who, after

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the general conquest of the land, would dwell in it still. Judg. 1:27 Indeed, when Israel grew strong, they brought them under tribute, but they could not utterly expel them. The kingdom and rule belongs to grace; and when it grows strong, it brings sin much under; but it will not wholly be driven out. The body of death is not to be utterly done away, but in the death of the body. In the flesh of the best saints there dwelleth "no good thing," Rom. 7:18; but the contrary is there, that is the root of all evil. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, as the Spirit lusteth against the flesh. Gal. 5:17. As, then, there is a universality in the actings of the Spirit in its opposing all evil, so there is a universality in the actings of the flesh for the furtherance of it.

Some lusts or branches of original corruption obtain in some persons such advantages, either from nature, custom, employment, society, or other circumstances, that they become like the Canaanites that had iron chariots; it is a very difficult thing to subdue them. Well it is if war be maintained constantly against them, for they will almost always be in actual rebellion.

Indwelling sin, though weakened, retains all its properties: the properties of a thing follow its nature. Where the nature of any thing is, there are all its natural properties. What are these properties of indwelling sin I should here declare, but that I have handled the whole power and efficacy, the nature and properties of it, in another treatise. In brief, they are such that it is no wonder that some believers are by them cast into depths; but it is indeed wonderful that any escape them.

2. The power and prevalence of *temptation;* which because I have also already shown in another discourse, I shall not here farther insist upon.

3. *The sovereign pleasure of God* in dealing with sinning saints must also be considered. Divine love and

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wisdom work not towards all in the same manner. God is pleased to continue peace to some, notwithstanding great provocations. Love shall humble them, and rebukes of kindness shall recover them from their wanderings. Others he is pleased to bring into the depths we have been speaking of. But yet I may say generally, signal provocations meet with one of these two events from God. 1. Those in whom they are, are left to some signal barrenness and fruitlessness in their generation; they wither, grow barren, worldly, and sapless, and are much cast out of the hearts of the people of God. Or, 2. They are exercised in these depths, from whence their way of deliverance is laid down in this psalm. Thus, I say, God deals with his saints in great variety. Some have all their bones broken, when others have only the gentle strokes of the rod. We are in the hands of mercy, and God may deal with us as seems good unto him; but great sins ought to be attended with expectations of great depths and perplexities.

III. What sins *usually bring believers into great spiritual distresses.*

Sins in their own nature *wasting conscience*, are of this sort. Sins that rise in opposition to all of God that is in us; that is, the light of grace and nature also; such are the sins that cast David into depths. Such are the sins enumerated, 1 Cor. 6: 9, 10. "Be not deceived," said the apostle, "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." Certain it is, that believers may fall into some of the sins here mentioned. Some have done so, as is left on record: the apostle says, not those who have committed any of these sins, but such sinners, shall not inherit the kingdom of God; that is, who live in these, or any

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of these sins, or any like them. There is no provision of mercy made for such sinners. These are sins, which, in their own nature, without the consideration of aggravating circumstances, plunge a soul into depths: these sins cut the locks of men's spiritual strength; and it is vain for them to say, We will go and do as at other times. Bones are not broken without pain, nor great sins brought on the conscience without trouble. But I need not insist on these. Some say that they deprive even true believers of all their interest in the love of God—but unduly; all grant that they bereave them of all comforting evidence and well-grounded assurance of it. So they did David and Peter, and herein lies no small part of the depths we are searching into. But

There are sins, which, though they do not rise up in the conscience with such a bloody guilt as those mentioned, yet, by reason of their aggravations, God makes them a root of disquietness and trouble to the soul all its days. He says of some sins of ungodly men, "As I live, this iniquity shall not be purged from you until ye die." If you are come to this height, you shall not escape, I will not spare you. And there are such provocations in his own people, that he will not let them pass before he hath cast them into depths, and made them cry out for deliverance. Let us consider some of them.

1. Sins under *signal enjoyments of love and kindness* from God are of this sort. When God hath given unto any one expressive manifestations of his love, convinced him of it, made him say, in the inmost parts of his heart, this is undeserved love and kindness; then, for him to be negligent in walking with God, is an aggravation that shall not be forgotten. It is a remark upon the sins of Solomon, that he fell into them after God had appeared unto him twice; and all sins under,

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or after especial mercies, will meet, at one time or other, with especial rebukes. Nothing more distresses the conscience of a sinner than the remembrance, in darkness, of abused light—in desertions, of neglected love. This, God will make him sensible of. "Though I have redeemed them," saith God, "yet they have spoken lies against me." When God has, in his providence, dealt graciously with a person—it may be, delivered him from straits and troubles, set him in a large place, blessed him in his person, relations, and employments, dealt well with his soul, in giving him a gracious sense of his love in Christ; for such a one to fall into sin goes to the heart of God, and shall not be passed over. Under-valuations of love are great provocations. "Hath Nabal thus requited my kindness?" saith David, "I cannot bear it." And the clearer our convictions of such sins, the more severe will be our reflections upon ourselves.

2. Sins under or after *great afflictions* are also of this character. God doth not afflict willingly, or chasten us merely for his pleasure; he does it to make us partakers of his holiness. To take so little notice of his hand, as under it, or after it, not to watch against the workings and surprisals of sin, has unkindness in it: "I smote him," saith God, "and he went on frowardly in the ways of his own heart." These provocations of his sons and daughters he cannot bear with. Has God brought thee into the furnace, so that thou hast melted under his hand, and in pity and compassion given thee enlargement, if thou hast soon forgotten his dealings with thee, is it any wonder if he remind thee by troubles in thy soul?

3. Breaking off from under *strong convictions* and drawings of love, before conversion, is often remembered upon the conscience afterwards. When the Lord, by his Spirit, shall mightily convince the heart of sin,

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and make to it withal some discoveries of his love and the excellencies of Christ, so that it begins to yield and be overpowered, being almost persuaded to be a christian; if then, through the strength of lust or unbelief, it goes back to the world or self-righteousness, its folly has unkindness with it, which sometimes shall not be passed by. God can, and often does put forth the greatness of his power for the recovery of such a soul; but yet he will deal with him about this contempt of his love and the excellency of his Son, which had been manifested to him.

4. Sudden *forgetfulness* of endearing manifestations of special love. This, God cautions his people against, as knowing their proneness to it. "God the Lord will speak peace to his people and his saints; but let them not turn again to folly." Ps. 85:8. Let them take heed of their aptness to forget endearing manifestations of special love. When God at any time draws nigh to a soul by his Spirit, in his word, with gracious words of peace and love, giving a sense of his kindness on the heart by the Holy Ghost, so that it is filled with joy unspeakable and glorious; for this soul, on a temptation, a diversion, or by mere carelessness and neglect, to suffer this sense of love to be, as it were, obliterated, and so lose that efficacy to obedience with which it is accompanied; this also is full of unkindness.

5. *Great opportunities neglected*, and great gifts not improved, are often the occasion of plunging the soul into great depths. Gifts are given to trade with for God; opportunities are the market-days for that trade. To hide the one in a napkin and let the other slip, will end in trouble. Disquietments and perplexities of heart are worms that will certainly breed in the rust of unexercised gifts. God loseth a revenue of glory and honor by such slothful souls; and he will make them sensible of it. I know some at this day whom omis-

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sions of opportunities for service are ready to sink into the grave.

6 Sins after especial *warning*. In all that variety of special warnings which God is pleased to use towards sinning saints, I shall single out one only. When a soul is wrestling with some lust or temptation, God, by his providence, causeth some special word, in the preaching of the Gospel or the administration of some ordinance peculiarly suited to the state of the soul, in the way of rebuke or persuasion, to come nigh and enter the inmost heart. The soul cannot but take notice that God is nigh to him, that he is dealing with him, and calling on him to look to him for assistance. And he seldom gives such warnings to his saints, but that he is nigh them in an eminent manner to give them relief and help, if, in answer to his call, they apply themselves to him; but if his care and kindness be neglected, his reproofs are usually more severe.

7. Sins that bring *scandal* seldom suffer the soul to escape depths. Even in great sins, God, in chastening, takes more notice often of the scandal than the sin; as 2 Sam. 12 : 14. Many professors take little notice of their worldliness, their pride, their passion, their lavish tongues; but the world do, and the Gospel is dishonored by it; and no wonder if they find, from the hand of the Lord, the bitter fruits.

Many other aggravations of sins there are, not perhaps in their own nature so appalling as some others, but which plunge the soul into depths. Those which have been named may suffice as illustrations; which is all we have aimed at.

The consideration of some *aggravations of the guilt* of these sins, which usually bring the soul into the condition described, shall close these remarks.

1. The soul is furnished with *a principle of grace*,

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which is continually operative, and working for its preservation from such sins. The new creature is living and active, from its own growth, increase, and security, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, "It lusteth against the flesh." It is naturally active for its own preservation and increase; as new-born children have a natural inclination to the food that will keep them alive, and cause them to grow. The soul then cannot fall into these entangling sins, but it must be with a high neglect of that very principle which is bestowed upon it for quite contrary ends and purposes. The laborings, lustings, desires, crying of it, are neglected. It is from God, and of God, and is the renovation of his image in us; that which God owneth and careth for; and the wounding of its vitals, the stifling of its operations, the neglect of its endeavors for the soul's preservation, always attend sins of such magnitude.

2. As this principle of life and obedience is not able of itself to preserve the soul from such sins as will bring it into depths, there is full *provision for continual supplies of it* in Jesus Christ. There are treasures of relief in Christ, to which the soul may at any time repair, and find succor against the incursions of sin. He says to the soul, as David to Abiathar, when he fled from Doeg, "Abide with me, fear not: he that seeketh my life, seeketh thy life; but with me thou shalt be in safety." Sin is my enemy no less than thine; it seeks the life of thy soul, and it seeks my life; abide with me, for with me thou shalt be in safety. To this the apostle exhorts us, "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Heb. 4 : 16. If ever it be a time of need with a soul, it is when under the assaults of provoking sins; at such a time there is suitable and seasonable help in Christ for succor and relief. The new creature begs, with sighs and groans, that the soul would apply

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itself unto him. To neglect him, with all his provision of grace, whilst he stands calling to us, "Open unto me, for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night"—cannot but be a high provocation. And what think we is the heart of Christ, when he sees his children giving way to conscience-wasting sins, without that application to him which the life and peace of their own souls call upon them for. These are not sins of daily infirmity, which cannot be escaped; but their guilt is always attended with a neglect, more or less, of the relief provided in Christ against them. The means of preservation from them is blessed, ready, nigh at hand; the interest of Christ in our preservation, great—of our souls, unspeakable; to neglect and despise means, Christ, our own soul's peace and life, must render guilt very guilty.

CHAPTER II.

RELIEF IN GOD ALONE.

The remaining words of the first two verses of the psalm show the acting of the soul in the depths described, that it may gain relief—"I have cried unto thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice, let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications."

A general application for relief is here made, in which is first to be considered, to whom the application is made; and that is, Jehovah. I have cried unto thee, Jehovah. God gave that name to his people to confirm their faith in the stability of his promises. Exod. 3. Being to deal with God about the promises of grace,

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he makes his application to him under this name. I call upon thee, Jehovah.

In the application it may be observed, that he prays that God would cause his ears to be attentive, after the manner of men, who seriously attend to what is spoken to them, when they turn aside from that which they regard not.

Also, the earnestness of the soul in this supplication, which is evident, both from the reduplication of his request, "Lord, hear my voice, let thine ears be attentive to my voice;" and the emphatical nature of the words he uses, "Let thine ears be (in the Hebrew, diligently) attentive." The word signifies the most diligent heedfulness and close attention; let thine ears be very attentive, and unto what? "to the voice of my supplication;" generally say interpreters, of my deprecations, or earnest prayers for the averting of evil or punishment. But the word is, to be gracious or merciful; so that it signifies properly supplications for grace. "Be attentive, O Lord, to my supplications for grace and mercy," which, according to my extreme necessity, I now make unto thee. And in these words the Psalmist sets forth, in general, the frame and working of a gracious soul cast into depths and darkness by sin. We hence derive these two propositions:

The only attempt of a sin-entangled soul for relief lies in an application *to God alone*. "To thee, Jehovah, have I cried; Lord, hear."

Depths of sin-entanglements will excite a gracious soul to *intense and earnest* supplications unto God. "Lord, hear; Lord, attend." Dying men do not usually cry out slothfully for relief.

I Trouble, danger, disquietude invariably lead us to seek relief. A drowning man needs no exhortation to endeavor his own deliverance and safety; and spiritual

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troubles, in like manner, put men on attempts for relief. To seek for no remedy is to be senselessly obdurate, or wretchedly desperate, as Cain and Judas. We may suppose, then, that the principal business of every soul in depths, is to endeavor deliverance. They cannot rest in that condition wherein they have no rest. In this endeavor, what course a gracious soul takes is laid down in the first proposition, negatively and positively. He applies not to any thing but God—he applies himself to God. An eminent instance of this we have in Hosea, 14 : 3. "Asshur," say those poor distressed, returning sinners, "shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods; for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Their application to God is attended with a renunciation of every other way of relief.

Several things there are that sinners are apt to apply themselves to for relief in their perplexities, which prove as waters that fail. How many things have the Romanists invented to deceive souls! Saints and angels, the blessed virgin, the wood of the cross, confessions, penances, masses, pilgrimages, and dirges, purgatories, papal pardons, works of compensation, and the like, are made entrances for innumerable souls into everlasting ruin. Did they know the terror of the Lord, the nature of sin, and of the mediation of Christ, they would be ashamed and confounded in themselves for these abominations; they would not say to these idols, Ye are our gods, come and save us.

How short do their contrivances come of his, who would fain offer rivers of oil, "yea, the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul, his first-born for his transgression," Micah, 6 : 7; who yet gains nothing but an aggravation of his sin and misery thereby: yea, the heathen went beyond them in devotion and expense. It is no new inquiry, what course sin-perplexed souls should

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take for relief. From the foundation of the world, the minds of far the greatest part of mankind have been exercised in it. Among those who were ignorant of God, this inquiry brought forth all that diabolical superstition which spread over the face of the world. Gentilism being destroyed by the power and efficacy of the Gospel, the same inquiry working in the minds of darkened men, in conjunction with other lusts, brought forth the papacy. When men had lost a spiritual acquaintance with the covenant of grace and mystery of the Gospel, the design of eternal love and efficacy of the blood of Christ, they betook themselves for relief, under their entanglements, to the broken cisterns mentioned. This mistake is predominant in all that are under the law; that is, to seek for relief in sin-distresses by self-endeavors, self-righteousness; hence many poor souls in straits apply but to themselves. They expect their cure from the same hand that wounded them. This was the life of Judaism, as the apostle informs us, Rom. 10 : 3; and all men under the law are still animated by the same principle: "They return, but not unto the Lord." Finding themselves in distress for sin, what course do they take? They do this: as they have offended so they will amend, and expect their peace to spring from thence, as if God and they stood on equal terms. In this way some spend their days, sinning and amending, amending and sinning, without once coming to repentance and peace. This the souls of believers watch against. They look on themselves as fatherless, "in thee the fatherless findeth mercy;" that is, helpless, without the least ground of hope in themselves, or expectation from themselves: they know their repentance, their amendment, their supplications, their humiliations, their fastings, their mortifications will not relieve them. Repent they will, and amend they will, and pray, and fast, and humble their souls, for they know these things to be their duty;

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but they know that their goodness extends not to Him with whom they have to do, nor is he profited by their righteousness. They will be in the performance of all duties, but they expect not deliverance by any duty. It is God, they say, with whom we have to do; our business is to hear what he will say unto us.

There are other ways whereby sinful souls destroy themselves by false reliefs. Diversion from their perplexing thoughtfulness pleases them. They will fix on something that cannot cure their disease, but may make them forget that they are sick; as Cain, under the terror of his guilt, departed from the presence of the Lord and sought inward rest in outward labor and employment; he "went and built a city." Gen. 4 : 17. Such courses Saul fixed on; first music, then a witch. Nothing is more common than for men thus to deal with their convictions. They see their sickness, feel their wound, and go to the Assyrian, Hos. 5 : 13; and this insensibly leads men into atheism. Frequent resort to creature-diversions from convictions of sin, is a great means of bringing on final impenitency. Some drunkards had, it may be, never been so, had they not been first convinced of other sins: they strive to stifle the guilt of one sin with another. They fly from themselves, from their consciences to their lusts, and seek for relief from sin by sinning. This is so far from believers, that they will not allow lawful things to be a diversion of their distress; use lawful things, they may and will—but not to divert their thoughts from their distresses; these they know must be issued between God and them; wear off they will not, but must be taken away. These rocks a gracious soul takes care to avoid. He knows it is God alone against whom he hath sinned; and God alone who can pardon his sin. "To Thee, O Lord, do I come;" thy word concerning me must stand; upon thee will I wait; if thou hast no delight in me, I must perish.

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Other remedies, I know, are vain; I intend not to spend my strength for that which is not bread. "Unto thee do I cry." Here a sin-entangled soul is to fix itself: trouble excites it to look for relief; many things without present themselves as a diversion; many things within offer themselves for a remedy. Forget thy sorrow, say the former; ease thyself of it by us, say the latter: the soul refuses both, as physicians of no value; and to God alone makes its application. He has wounded, and he alone can heal. And until any one that is sensible of the guilt of sin will come off from all reserves to deal immediately with God, it is in vain for him to expect relief.

II. In this application to God alone the soul is *intense, earnest, and urgent.* It is no time now to be slothful: the soul's all, its greatest concerns are at stake. Dull, cold, formal applications to God will not serve the turn: ordinary actings of faith, love and fervency, usual seasons, opportunities, duties, answer not this condition. To do no more than ordinary now, is to do nothing at all. He that puts forth no more strength and activity for his deliverance when he is in depths ready to perish, than when he is at liberty in plain and smooth paths, is scarcely like to escape. Some in such conditions are careless and negligent; they think in ordinary course to wear off their difficulties; and that, though at present they are sensible of their danger, they shall have peace at last; in which frame there is much contempt of God. Some despond and languish under their distresses. Spiritual sloth influences both these classes. But the steadfast soul resolves, by whatsoever means, public or private, of communion with others, or solitary retiredness, Christ ever was or may be found, or peace be obtained, I will seek him, and not give over until I come to an enjoyment of him. And this frame, this re-

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solution a soul in depths must come unto, if ever it expect deliverance. For the most part, "men's wounds stink, and are corrupt, because of their foolishness." As the Psalmist complains, Psalm 38 : 5, they are wounded by sin, and through spiritual sloth they neglect their cure; this weakens them, and disquiets them day by day; yet they endure all rather than they will come out of their carnal ease to deal effectually with God. It was otherwise with David, "Why," saith he, "art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the day-time, and in the night season, and am not silent." Psalm 22 : 1, 2. What ails the man? Can he not be quiet, night or day? never be silent, never hold his peace? And if he be somewhat disquieted, can he not contain himself, but he must roar and cry out; yea, must he roar thus "all the day long," Psalm 32 : 3, and "groan all the night," as Psalm 6 : 6? What is the cause of all this roaring, sighing, and tears? Ah! let him alone, his soul is bitter in him; he has fallen into depths; the Lord is withdrawn from him; yea, he is full of anxiety on account of sin; there is no quietness nor soundness in him; and he must thus earnestly and restlessly apply himself for relief. Alas! what strangers for the most part are men to this state of soul! How little of the workings of this spirit is found amongst us! And is not the reason of it, that we value the world more, and heaven and heavenly things less, than he did? that we think we can live without a sense of the love of God in Christ? and is it not hence that we see so many withering professors without communion with God, who will go on ready to perish, rather than, with this holy man, thus stir up themselves to meet the Lord. "My soul," saith he, "is full of troubles, and my life draweth nigh unto the grave." And how did he act in this heavy, disconsolate condition? "O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night unto thee, let my prayer come

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before thee, incline thine ear unto my cry," ver. 1, 2. Day and night he cries to the God of his salvation, and that with earnestness and importunity.

The greatest of men's interests may well occasion this earnestness. Suppose a man of the world should have his house, wherein all his stock and riches are laid up, set on fire, would he be calm and quiet in the consideration of it? Would he not bestir himself with all his might, and call in all the help he could obtain; and that because his portion, his all, his great interest is at stake? And shall the soul be slothful, careless and secure, when the light of God's countenance, which is more to him than the greatest increase of corn and wine can be to the men of the world, is removed from him? What a fatal sense of security did it argue in Jonah, that he was fast asleep when the ship was ready to be cast away for his sake. And will it be thought less in any soul, who being in a storm of wrath and displeasure from God sent out into the deep after him, shall neglect it, and sleep, as Solomon says, on the top of a mast in the midst of the sea? How did that poor creature, whose heart was mad on his idols, (Judges, 18 : 24,) cry out, when he was deprived of them! "You have taken away my gods, and what have I more?" And shall a gracious soul, through his own folly, lose his God, the sense of his love, the consolation of his presence, and not with all his might follow hard after him? Can such forbear crying out with Job, "O that it were with us as in former days, when the candle of the Lord was upon our tabernacle?" chap. 29 : 2–4; and with David, "O Lord, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation?" Psalm 51 : 12. But suppose they might pass on in their pilgrimage whilst all is prosperous about them; what will they do in the time of outward trials and distresses, when deep calleth unto deep, and one trouble excites and sharpens another? Nothing then will

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support them, they know, but that which is now wanting.

Again, they have *a deep sense* of these their great concerns. All men equally need the love of God and pardon of sin. Every one has a soul of immortal constitution, capable of bliss and wo: yet most men are so stupidly sottish that they take little notice of these things. Neither the guilt of sin, nor the wrath of God, nor death, nor hell, can arouse them. But gracious souls have a quick, living sense of spiritual things.

They have *a spiritual light*, whereby they discern the true nature of sin and the terror of the Lord. For though they may now have lost the comforting, they lose not the *sanctifying* light of the Spirit, the light whereby they are enabled to discern spiritual things in a spiritual manner; this never utterly departs from them. By this they see sin to be "exceeding sinful," by this they "know the terror of the Lord," and that it is "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." By this they discover the excellency of the love of God in Christ, which passeth knowledge, the present sense whereof they have lost. By this they are enabled to look within the veil, and to take a view of the blessed consolations which the saints enjoy, whose communion with God is never interrupted: this represents to them all the joy and peace which in former days they had whilst God was present with them in love; and they are taught to value all the fruits of the blood of Jesus Christ.

They remember *what it cost them* formerly to deal with God about sin; and hence they know it is no ordinary matter they have in hand. A recovery from depths is as a new conversion. Oft-times in it the whole work, as to the soul's apprehension, is gone over afresh. This the soul knows to have been a work of dread, terror, and trouble, and trembles in itself at its new trials.

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The Holy Ghost gives them a fresh sense of their deep concerns, on purpose to stir them up to these earnest applications to God. The whole work is his, and he carries it on by means suited to the end; and by these means is a gracious soul brought into the state mentioned. In this work several things concur.

1. *A continual thoughtfulness* about the sad condition of the soul in its depths. "Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore; there is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin: for mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink, and are corrupt, because of my foolishness. I am troubled, I am bowed down, I go mourning all the day long. I am feeble and sore broken, I have roared for the disquietness of my heart." Psalm 38 : 2–8. Restlessness, disquietness of heart, continual heaviness of soul, sorrow and anxiety, lie at the bottom of the applications we are speaking of. From these principles their prayers flow out, as David adds, verse 9, "Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee." He prayed out of the abundance of his meditation and grief. Thoughts of their condition lie down with such persons, and rise with them, and accompany them all the day long. As Reuben cried, "The child is not; and I, whither shall I go?" so doth such a soul: The love of God is not, Christ is not; and I, whither shall I cause my sorrow to go? God is provoked, death is nigh at hand, relief is far away, darkness is about me; I have lost my peace, my joy, my song in the night: what do I think of duties? Can two walk together unless they be agreed? Can I walk with God in them while I have thus made him mine enemy? What do I think of ordinances? Will it do me any good to be at Jerusalem, and not see the face of the king; to

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live under ordinances, and not to meet in them with the King of saints? May I not justly fear that the Lord will take his Holy Spirit from me, until I be left without remedy? With such thoughts as these are sin-entangled souls exercised in all their applications to God.

2. We see the application itself consists in crying unto God. Now this is done with *intenseness of mind.* It is said of our blessed Savior, that when he was in depths for our sins, he offered up "prayers and supplication, with strong cries and tears." Heb. 5 : 7. Strong cries and tears express the utmost intensity of spirit. David expresses it by roaring, as we have seen; as also by sighing, groaning and panting. A soul in such a condition lies down before the Lord, with sighs, groans, mourning, cries, tears, and roaring, according to the various workings of his heart; and this produces,

Importunity. The power of the importunity of our faith, our Savior hath marvellously set forth, Luke, 11 : 8–10, as also chapter 18 : 1. Importunate prayer is prevailing; and importunity is, as it were, made up of these two things; frequency of interposition and variety of arguings. A man that is importunate will come to you seven times a day about the same business; and after all, if any new thought come into his mind, though he had resolved to the contrary, he will come again; and nothing can be imagined to relate to the business he has in hand, but he will turn it to the furtherance of his plea. So is it in this case. Men will use both frequency of interposition and variety of arguings. "I cry unto thee daily," or rather all the day. Psalm 88 : 1. By this means we "give God no rest," which is the very character of importunity. Such souls go to God; and they are not satisfied with what they have done, but they go again and again. What variety of arguments are pleaded with God I could show in the history of David. But it is known to all; there is hardly

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any thing that he does not make a plea of; the faithfulness, righteousness, name, mercy, goodness, and kindness of God in Jesus Christ; the concern of others in him, both the friends and foes of God; his own weakness and helplessness, yea, the greatness of sin itself: "Be merciful to my sin," saith he, "for it is great." Sometimes he begins with some arguments of this kind; and then, being a little diverted by other considerations, some new plea is suggested to him by the Spirit, and he returns immediately to his first employment and design—all arguing great intensity of mind and spirit.

Constancy also flows from intenseness. Such a soul will not give over until it obtains what it looks for, as we shall see in further considering this psalm. This is, in general, the deportment of a gracious soul in the condition here represented. As poor creatures love their peace, as they love their souls, as they value the glory of God, they must not be wanting in this duty. What is the reason that controversies hang so long between God and your souls that, it may be, you scarce see a good day all your lives? Is it not, for the most part, from your sloth and despondency of spirit? you will not gird up the loins of your mind in dealing with God, to put them to a speedy issue in the blood of Christ. You go on and off, begin and cease, try and give over; and for the most part, though your case be extraordinary, content yourselves with ordinary and customary applications to God. This makes you wither, become useless, and pine away under your perplexities. David did not so; but after many and many a breach made by sin, through quick, vigorous, restless actings of faith, all was repaired, so that he lived peaceably and died triumphantly. Up, then, and be doing; make thorough work of that which lies before you; be it long or difficult, it must be done, and is attended with safety.

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CHAPTER III.

GOD'S MARKING INIQUITY.

The general frame of a gracious soul, in its perplexities about sin, has been declared. Its particular actings are next represented unto us in verse 3: "If thou, Lord, shouldst *mark iniquities*, O Lord, who shall stand?"

"If thou, Lord." He here fixes on another name of God, which is JAH: a name from the same root with the former, but used to intimate and express the terrible majesty of God: "He rideth on the heavens, and is extolled by his name JAH." Psalm 68:4. He is to deal now with God about the guilt of sin; and God is represented to the soul as great and terrible, that he may know what to expect if the matter must be tried according to the demerit of sin.

"If thou shouldst mark iniquities:" that is, so consider and observe them, as to reserve them for punishment and vengeance. In opposition to this marking, God is said not to see sin, to overlook it, to cover it, to remember it no more; that is, to forgive it, as the next verse declares.

I need not show that God so far marks all sins in all persons, as to see them, know them, disallow them, and to be displeased with them. This cannot be denied, without taking away all the grounds of fear and worship. To deny it is equivalent to denying the very being of God; deny his holiness and righteousness, and you deny his existence. But there is a day appointed wherein all men shall know that God knew, and took notice of, all and every one of their most secret sins. There is then a double marking of sin in God, neither of which can be denied in reference unto any sins, in any persons.

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The first is natural, consisting in his omniscience, whereunto all things are open and naked. Thus no sin is hid from him; the most secret is before the light of his countenance: all are marked by him. The other, moral, in a displeasure against every sin, which is inseparable from the nature of God on account of his holiness. And this is declared in the sentence of the law, and that equally to all men. But the marking here intended implies animadversion, and punishment according to the tenor of the law. Not only the sentence of the law, but a will of punishing according to it, is included in it. "If," saith the Psalmist, "thou, the great and dreadful God, who art extolled by thy glorious name JAH, shouldst take notice of iniquities, so as to recompense sinners that come unto thee according to the severity of thy holy law:" what then? It is answered by the proposal, "Who can stand?" that is, none can stand. No man, not one in the world can stand or abide the trial. Every one, on this supposition, must perish, and that eternally. This, the desert of sin and the curse of the law, which is the rule of thus marking their iniquity, require. There is great emphasis in the form of this interrogation. When the Holy Ghost would show the certainty and dreadfulness of the perdition of ungodly men, he does it by such a kind of expression, wherein there is a deeper sense intimated than any words can well clothe or declare: "What then shall be the end of them that obey not the Gospel?" 1 Peter, 4:17; and verse 18, "Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" So here, "Who can stand?" There is a deep insinuation of a dreadful ruin, as to all with whom God shall so deal as to mark their iniquities. See Psalm 1:5.

The Psalmist then, addressing himself to deal with God about sin, lays down, in the first place, in general, what the result must be, not to himself only, but to all the world, should God mark iniquity. This is not my

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case only, but it is so with all mankind—every one who is partaker of flesh and blood, whether their guilt answer that which I am oppressed with or not; guilty are they all, and all must perish. How much more must that be my condition, who have contracted such guilt as I have done. Here, then, he brings a great argument against himself. If none, not the holiest, the humblest, the most believing soul, can abide the trial, how much less can I, who am the chief of sinners, the least of saints, who come unspeakably behind them in holiness, and have equally gone beyond them in sin?

This is the sense and import of the words. Let us now consider how they are expressive of the actings of the soul whose state is here represented, and what directions they afford for them who are fallen into this state.

We may here observe that, in God's marking sin according to the tenor of the law, the case is the same with *all classes of sinners*, whether before conversion, or in relapses and entanglements after conversion. There is a likeness between conversion and recoveries. They are both wrought by the same means, and have the same effects upon the souls of sinners, although in sundry things they differ. The considerations we now present may be applied both to those who are yet unconverted, and to those who are really delivered from their natural state; but especially to those who know not which state they are in, that is, to all guilty souls. The law will put in its claim upon all. It will condemn the sin, and try what it can do against the sinner. There is no shaking it off; it must be fairly answered, or it will prevail. The law issues an arrest for the debt; and it is to no purpose to bid the officer begone, or to entreat him to spare. If payment be not made, and an acquittance produced, the soul must be sent to prison. I am going to God, saith the soul; he is great and terrible, a marker of sin, and what shall I say unto him? This makes him

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tremble, and cry out, "O Lord, who shall stand?" Hence we lay down this proposition:

In a sin-perplexed soul's addresses to God, the first thing that presents itself is *God's marking sin according to the tenor of the law, which is likely to fill the soul with* DREAD AND TERROR.

The Lord speaks of some, who, when they hear the words of the curse, yet bless themselves, and say they shall have peace. Deut. 29 : 19. Let men preach and say what they will of the terror of the Lord, they will despise it. This conduct God threatens with utter extermination. Generally it is with sinners as it was with Gaal the son of Ebed, when he was fortifying Sichem against Abimelech; Zebul tells him that Abimelech will come and destroy him. Let him come, saith Gaal, I shall deal well enough with him; let him bring forth his army, I fear him not: but upon the very first appearance of Abimelech's army he trembled for fear. Tell obdurate sinners of the wrath of God, and that he will come to plead his cause against them; for the most part they take no notice of what you say, but go on as if they were resolved they should deal well enough with him. Notwithstanding all their stoutness, a day is coming wherein fearfulness shall surprise them, and make them cry out, "Who among us shall dwell with devouring fire, who among us shall inhabit everlasting burnings?" Yea, if the Lord be pleased in this life, in an especial manner, to draw nigh to any of them, they quickly see that their "hearts cannot endure, nor can their hands be strong." Ezek. 22 : 14. Their hands hang down, and their stout hearts tremble like an aspen-leaf.

He who first sinned was a striking instance of what we have affirmed. "He heard the voice of God." Gen. 3 : 8. So he had done before, without the least trouble or consternation: he was made for communion with

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God; and that he might hear his voice was part of his blessedness. But now, saith he, "I heard thy voice, and was afraid, and hid myself." He knew that God was coming on the inquest of sin, and he was not able to bear the thoughts of meeting him; could he have gone into the bowels of the earth, from whence he was taken, and have been there hid from God, he would have done it. Things are now altered with him: in that God whom he loved before, as a good, holy, powerful, righteous Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, and Rewarder, he now sees only wrath, indignation, vengeance, and terror. This draws from him those dreadful words, "I heard thy voice, and was afraid, and hid myself."

The giving of the law evinces what effects the consideration of God's proceeding with sinners according to the tenor of it must produce. "All the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking." Exodus, 20: 18, 19; Heb. 12: 18. In this manner came forth from the Lord that fiery law. Deut. 33: 2. So that all who were concerned in it did exceedingly quake and tremble. And yet all this respects but the severity of the law in general, without the application of it to any soul in particular. There is a solemnity that carries an awe with it, in the preparation of an assize to be kept and held by poor worms like ourselves; but the dread of it is peculiar to the malefactors for whose trial and execution the preparation is made. When a soul comes to think that all this dreadful preparation, this appearance of terrible majesty, these streams of the fiery law, are pointed towards him, it will make him cry out, "Lord, who can stand?" And this law is still in force towards sinners, even as it was on the day wherein it was given on Mount Sinai. Though Moses grew old, yet his strength never failed; nor has the law given by him lost any thing of strength, power, or authority towards sinners.

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It is still accompanied with thunderings and lightnings as of old; and it will not fail to represent the terror of the Lord to a guilty soul.

Among the saints themselves I could produce instances to show that they have found it to be thus. The cases of Job and David are known; I shall only consider it in Christ himself. From himself, he had no occasion of any discouraging thought; being holy, harmless, undefiled. He fulfilled all righteousness, did his Father's will in all things, and abode in his love. This must be attended with the highest peace and most blessed joy. In the very entrance on his trials he had a full persuasion of a comfortable issue and success; as we may see, Isaiah, 50 : 7, 8. But yet, when his soul was exercised with thoughts of God's marking our iniquities upon him, it was sorrowful unto death. He was "amazed, and very heavy." His agony, his bloody sweat, his strong cries and supplications, his reiterated prayers, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me," his last and dreadful cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" all manifest what apprehensions he had of what it was for God to mark iniquities. Well may poor sinners cry out, "Lord, who shall stand?" when the Son of God himself so trembled under the weight of it.

In serious thoughts of God marking sin, he is represented to the soul under all those glorious terrible attributes and excellences which beget dread and terror in the hearts of sinners when they have no relief from any covenant-engagements in Christ. The soul looks upon him as the great Lawgiver, (James, 4 : 12,) able to revenge the breach of it by destroying body and soul in hell; as one terrible in holiness, of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; the living God, into whose hands it is a fearful thing to fall; as attended with vindictive justice, saying, "Vengeance is mine, I will recompense." Heb. 10 : 30. Now, for a soul to consider God clothed with

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all those dreadful and terrible excellences, coming to deal with sinners according to the tenor of his fiery law, cannot but make him cry out with Moses, "I exceedingly fear and quake." These things work in their minds the conclusion that God's marking sin according to the tenor of the law, and man's salvation, are utterly inconsistent; a conclusion that must shake a soul when pressed under a sense of its own guilt.

When a person who is really guilty, and knows himself to be guilty, is brought to his trial, he has but these four grounds of hope that his safety and his trial may be consistent. He may think that either, 1. The Judge will not be able to discover his crimes; or, 2. That some one will powerfully intercede for him with the Judge; or, 3. That the rule of the law is not so strict as to notice his errors; or, 4. That the penalty is not so severe but there may be a way of escape. Cut him short of his expectations from some one or all of these, and all his hopes must of necessity perish.

1. Of *the Judge* we have spoken somewhat already. The present inquiry is, Whether any thing may be *hid* from him, and so a door of escape be opened to a sinner? The apostle tells us, "That all things are naked and open unto Him," Heb. 4 : 13; and the Psalmist, that there "is not a thought in our hearts nor a word in our tongue but he understandeth it afar off, and knoweth it altogether." Psalm 139 : 2, 4. What the sinner knows of himself which may cause him to fear, *that* God knows; and what he knows not of himself that deserves his fear, *that* God knows also: "He is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things." 1 John, 3 : 20. When God shall not only set in order before the sinner the secret sins which he retains some remembrance of, but also bring to mind that world of abominations of which either he never took any notice or hath utterly forgotten, it will trouble, yea, confound him.

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2. But may not this Judge be entreated to *pass by what he knows, and deal favorably* with the sinner? May not an intercessor be obtained, to plead in behalf of the guilty soul? Eli determines this matter, 1 Samuel, 2 : 25, "If any one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" There is not, saith Job, between us one that might argue the case in pleading for me, and so make up the matter, "laying his hand upon us both." Job, 9 : 33. We now consider a sinner purely under the administration of the law, which knows nothing of a Mediator. In that case, who shall take upon him to intercede for the sinner? Besides that all creatures in heaven and earth are engaged in the contest of God against sinners; and besides the greatness and terror of his Majesty, that will certainly deter all, or any of them, from undertaking any such work; what is the request that, in this case, must be put up to God? Is it not that he would cease to be holy, cease to be righteous, relinquish his throne, deny himself and his sovereignty, that a rebel, a traitor, his cursed enemy may live and escape his justice? Is this request reasonable? Is he fit to intercede for sinners that would make it? Would he not, by so doing, prove himself to be the greatest of them? The sinner cannot then expect any door of escape to be opened to him. All the world is against him; and the case must be tried out nakedly, between God and him. But,

3. It may be, the rule of the law whereby the sinner is to be tried is *not so strict*, but that in the case of such sins as he is guilty of, it may admit of a favorable interpretation: or that the good he has done may be laid in the balance against his evil, and so some relief be obtained. But the matter is quite otherwise; there is no good action of a sinner, though it were perfectly good, that can lie in the balance with, or compensate

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the evil of the least sin committed: for all good is due on another account, though no guilt were incurred. As the payment of money that a man has borrowed makes no satisfaction for what he has stolen; no more will our duties compensate for our sins. Nor is there any good action of a sinner but it has evil and guilt enough attending it to render itself unacceptable; so that men may well cease from thoughts of supererogation, or doing more than duty requires. Besides, where there is any one sin, if all the good in the world might be supposed to be in the same person, yet, in the indispensable order of our dependance on God, nothing of that good could come into consideration till the guilt of that sin were answered for to the utmost. The penalty of every sin being the eternal ruin of the sinner, all his supposed good can avail him nothing. And for the law itself, it is an issue of the holiness, and righteousness, and wisdom of God; so that there is not any evil, great or small, but is forbidden and condemned by it. "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified," Psalm 143: 2. That is, if things are to be tried and determined by the law, no sinner can be acquitted. Rom. 3: 20. Gal. 2: 16. But yet,

4. It may be, *the sentence of the law is not so fierce and dreadful* but that, though guilt be found, there may be yet a way of escape. But the law speaks not one word on this side death to an offender. There is a greatness and an eternity of wrath in the sentence of it; and it is God himself who hath undertaken to see the vengeance of it executed. So that, on all these accounts, the conclusion mentioned must be fixed in the soul of a sinner that entertains thoughts of drawing nigh to God.

Though what has been spoken may be of general use to sinners of all classes, whether called home to God,

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or yet strangers to him; yet I shall not insist upon any general improvement of it, because it is intended only for one special end or purpose. What is aimed at is, to show that in the first thoughts that arise in the heart of a poor entangled soul when he begins to endeavor a return to God, the law immediately puts in its claim against him. God is represented to him as angry, and his terror besets him round about. This fills him with fear and confusion, so that he knows not what to do. These troubles are greater or less, according as God sees it best for the poor creature's present humiliation and future safety. What then does the sinner? What are his thoughts on this subject? Does he think to fly from God, and to give over all endeavors of recovery? Does he say, This God is a holy and terrible God, I cannot serve him; it is to no purpose for me to look for any thing but fury and destruction from him, and therefore I may as well give over as persist in my design of drawing nigh to him. It cannot be denied that thoughts of this nature will be suggested by unbelief, and sometimes great perplexities arise to the soul. But this is not the issue and final product of this exercise of the soul: it produces another effect; it calls for that which is the first particular working of a gracious soul, arising out of its sin-entanglements: viz. 1, a sincere sense of sin; and, 2, the acknowledgment of it; with, 3, self-condemnation in the justification of God.

I. A SINCERE SENSE OF SIN. There is a twofold sense of sin: the one general and intellectual, whereby a man knows what sin is, that he is a sinner, that he is guilty of this or that, these or those sins; but his heart is not affected proportionally to his knowledge. The other is active and efficacious, in which the soul being acquainted with the nature of sin and its own guilt, is influenced by that apprehension to suitable affections and acts.

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Of both these we have an instance in the same person. David, before Nathan's coming to him, had the former; afterwards he had the latter also. It cannot be imagined but that, before the coming of the prophet, he had a general knowledge of the nature of sin, and that he was a sinner, and guilty of those very sins for which afterwards he was reproved. But yet this wrought not in him any one affection suitable to his condition; and the same may be said of most sinners in the world. But now, when Nathan comes to him and gives him the latter efficacious sense of which we speak, we know what effects it produced. It is the latter only that is under consideration; a deep and practical apprehension, wrought in the mind and heart by the Holy Ghost, of sin and its evils, in reference to the law and love of God, the cross and blood of Christ, the communion and consolation of the Spirit, and all the fruits of love, mercy or grace that it has been made partaker of, or on gospel-grounds has hoped for.

1. The principal *efficient cause* of it is the Holy Ghost: he it is who "convinceth of sin." John, 16:8. He works indeed by means. He wrought it in David by the ministry of Nathan, and he wrought it in Peter by the look of Christ. But his work it is. No man can work it upon his own soul. It will not spring out of men's rational considerations. Though men may exercise their thoughts about such things as one would think were enough to break the hearts of stones; yet if the Holy Ghost put not forth a peculiar efficacy of his own, this sense of sin will not be produced. As the waters at the pool of Bethesda were not troubled but when an angel descended and moved them, no more will the heart be for sin without a saving entrance of the Holy Ghost.

2. It is *a deep apprehension* of sin, and the evils of it. Slight transient thoughts amount not to the sense of which we speak. "My sorrow," saith David, "is con-

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tinually before me." Psalm 38 : 17. It pressed him always, and greatly. Hence he compares this sense of sin, wrought by the Holy Ghost, to "arrows that stick in the flesh." verse 2. They pain sorely, and are always perplexing. Sin, in this sense of it, lays hold on the soul so that the sinner cannot "look up;" and it abides with him, making "his sore run in the night without ceasing," and deprives the soul of rest: "My soul," saith he, "refused to be comforted." This apprehension of sin lies down and rises with him.

3. It is *practical*. It is not seated merely in the speculative part of the mind, hovering in general notions; but it dwells in the practical understanding, which effectually influences the will and affections; such an apprehension, that sorrow and humiliation are inseparable from it.

4. It has respect to *the law of God*. There can be no due consideration of sin in which the law has not its place. The more a man sees of the excellency of the law, the more he sees of the vileness of sin. This is true of a soul in its first endeavor for a recovery from the entanglements of sin. He labors thoroughly to know his disease, that he may be cured. It will do him no good, he knows, to be ignorant of his disease or his danger. He knows that if his wounds be not searched to the bottom they will fester and destroy him. To the law, then, he brings himself and his sin; and by it learns his vileness and danger. Most men lie in their depths because they wish to avoid the first step of their rising: from the bottom of their misery they would fain at once be at the top of their felicity. The soul, led in this work by the Holy Ghost, does not so. He converses with the law, brings his sins to it, and fully hears its sentence. As ever you desire to come to rest, avoid not this entrance of your passage unto it. Weigh well what the law speaks of your sin and its desert, or you will never

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make a due application to God for forgiveness. As ever you would have your souls justified by grace, take care to have your sins judged by the law.

5. There is in this sense of sin a respect to *the love of God*. And this breaks the heart of the poor returning sinner. Sorrow from the law shuts itself up in the soul and strangles it. Sorrow from thoughts of the love of God opens it and causes it to flow forth. Thoughts of sinning against the love of God, managed by the Holy Ghost—what shall I say? their effects in the heart are not to be expressed. This made Ezra cry out, "O my God, I blush and am ashamed to lift up my face to thee—What shall we say after this?" After what? why, all the fruits of love and kindness they had been made partakers of. Thoughts of love and sin laid together, make the soul blush, mourn, and be ashamed and confounded in itself. So Ezekiel, 36:31; "Then shall you remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good." When shall they do so? when thoughts and apprehensions of love shall be brought home to them; then "shall you loathe yourselves in your own sight." The soul now calls to mind what love, what kindness, what mercy, what grace, what patience has been exercised towards it. The thoughts of all these now come in upon him as streams of water. Such mercy, such communion, such privileges, such hopes of glory, such tastes of heaven, such peace, such consolation, such joy, such communications of the Spirit, all to a poor, wretched, cursed, lost, forlorn sinner; and all this despised, neglected; the God of them all provoked, forsaken! Ah! saith the soul, "whither shall I cause my sorrow to go?" This fills him with shame and confusion of face; makes him mourn in secret, and sigh to the breaking of the loins.

6. *The blood and cross of Christ* is also brought to remembrance by the Holy Ghost. Ah! saith the soul,

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have I thus requited the wonderful love of my Redeemer? Is this the return, the requital I have made to him? Are not heaven and earth astonished at the despising of such love? This broke Peter's heart, on the look of Christ. Such words as these from Christ will, in this condition, sound in the ears of the soul: "Did I love thee, and leave my glory to become a scorn and reproach for thy sake? Did I think my life, and all that was dear to me, too good for thee, to save thee from the wrath to come? Have I been a wilderness unto thee, or a land of darkness? What could I have done more for thee? When I had nothing left but my life, it went for thee, that thou mightest live by my death, be washed in my blood, and be saved through my soul's being made an offering for thee! and hast thou thus requited my love, to prefer a lust before me, the world before me, or by mere sloth and folly to be turned away from me? Go, unkind, unthankful soul, and see if thou canst find another Redeemer." This overwhelms the soul, and even drowns it in tears and sorrow. And then the bitterness of the sufferings of Christ are brought to mind. "They look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn." Zech. 12 : 10. They remember his gall and wormwood, his cries and tears, his agony and sweat, his desertion and anguish, his blood and death, the sharpness of the sword that was in his soul, and the bitterness of the cup that was put into his hand. Such a soul now looks on Christ, bleeding, dying, wrestling with wrath and curse for him, and sees his sins in the streams of blood that issued from his side; and all this increases the sense of sin of which we speak.

7. It relates to *the communion and consolations of the Holy Ghost*, with all the privileges and fruits of love we are by him made partakers of. The Spirit is given to believers, upon the promise of Christ, to dwell in them He takes up their hearts to be his dwelling-place: to

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what ends and purposes? that he may purify and sanctify them, make them holy, and dedicate them to God; furnish them with graces and gifts, interest them in privileges, guide, direct, comfort them, and seal them unto the day of redemption. Now this Spirit is grieved by sin, Ephes. 4: 30; and his dwelling-place defiled thereby. 1 Cor. 6: 19, and 3: 17. Thoughts of this greatly sharpen the spiritual sense of sin in a recovering soul. He considers what light, what love, what joy, what consolation, what privileges he has been made partaker of; what warnings to keep him from sin he has received from the Spirit; and says within himself, "What have I done? whom have I grieved? whom have I provoked? what if the Lord should now, for my folly and ingratitude, utterly take his Holy Spirit from me? what if I should have so grieved him that he will dwell in me no more, delight in me no more? What dismal darkness, yea, what utter ruin should I be left unto! And what shame and confusion of face belong to me for my wretched ingratitude towards him!"

This is the first thing that appears in the returning soul: a sincere sense of sin wrought in it by the Holy Ghost. And this a soul in the depths described must come to, if ever it expects deliverance. Let not such persons expect to have a renewed sense of mercy without a revived sense of sin.

II. Hence proceeds an ingenuous, free, gracious *acknowledgment of sin*. Men may have a sense of sin, and yet suffer it to lie burning as a fire shut up in their bones, to their continual disquietude, without coming to a free, soul-opening acknowledgment. Yea, confession may be made in general, with the mention of that very sin in which the soul is most entangled, and yet the soul come short of a due performance of this duty. Consider how the case stood with David: "When I kept

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silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long." Psalm 32 : 3. How could David keep silence, and yet roar all the day long? What is that silence which is consistent with roaring? It is a mere negation of the duty expressed, verse 5, that is intended: "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquities I have not hid." It was not a silence of submission and waiting on God: that would not have produced a wasting of his spiritual strength, as he complains this silence did; nor yet was it a sullen, stubborn, contumacious spirit. He implies, as Calvin well says, "an affection between patience and stubbornness, bordering on the one and the other:" that is, he had a deep sense of sin; this disquieted and perplexed him all the day long, which he calls his roaring; it weakened and wearied him, making his bones wax old, or his strength decay. Yet was he not able to bring his heart to that ingenuous, gracious acknowledgment which, like the opening of a festered wound, would have given at least some ease to his soul. God's children are often, in this matter, like ours: though they are convinced of a fault, and are really troubled at the thought of it, yet they will hardly acknowledge it. So do God's people: they will go up and down, sigh and mourn; but an evil and untoward frame of spirit, under the power of unbelief and fear, keeps them from this duty.

Now that this acknowledgment may be acceptable to God, it is required that it be *free*, and that it be *full*.

1. It must be *free and spiritually ingenuous*. Cain, Pharaoh, Ahab, Judas, came all to an acknowledgment of sin; but it was whether they would or not. It was pressed out of them: it did not willingly flow from them. The confession of a person under the convincing terrors of the law or dread of threatening judgments, is like that of malefactors on the rack, who speak out that for which they and their friends must die. What they say,

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though it be truth, is a fruit of force and torture, not of any ingenuousness of mind. So is it with merely convinced persons; they come not to the acknowledgment of sin with any more freedom; and the reason is, because all sin has shame! and for men to be free to shame is naturally impossible, shame being nature's shrinking from itself. But now the returning soul has never more freedom, liberty and aptitude of spirit, than when he is in the acknowledgment of those things whereof he is most ashamed. And this is no small evidence that it proceeds from the Spirit, which is attended with liberty; for "where the Spirit of God is, there is liberty." 2 Cor. 3 : 17. When David was delivered from his silence, he expresses this spirit in the performance of this duty: "I acknowledged my sin, and mine iniquity I have not hid: I said, I will confess my transgression." Psalm 32 : 5. His mouth is now open and his heart enlarged; and he multiplies one expression upon another, to manifest his enlargement. So doth a soul, rising out of its depths, in the beginning of this address to God. Having the true sense of sin wrought in him by the Holy Ghost, his heart is made free, and enlarged unto an ingenuous acknowledgment of his sin before the Lord. He pours out his soul unto God; and hath not more freedom in any thing than in confessing that of which he is most ashamed.

2. This acknowledgment must also be *full*. Reserves ruin conversion. If the soul have any secret thought of rolling a sweet morsel under its tongue, as bowing in the house of Rimmon, it is like part of the price kept back, which makes the whole a robbery instead of an offering. If there be remaining a bitter root of favoring any one lust or sin, or any occasion of or temptation to sin, let a man be as open, free and earnest as can be imagined in the acknowledgment of all other sins, the whole duty is rendered abominable. Some persons, when

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they are brought into depths and anguish about any sin, and are forced to the acknowledgment of it, are at the same time little concerned for their other follies and iniquities, which, it may be, are no less provoking to God; "let not such a man think that he shall receive any thing from God." It must be full and comprehensive, as well as free and ingenuous. Of such importance is the right performance of this duty, that the promise of pardon is often peculiarly annexed to it, as that which certainly carries along with it the other duties which make up a full returning unto God. Prov. 28 : 13; 1 John, 1 : 9; Job, 33 : 27, 28.

III. There yet remains *self-condemnation, with the justification of God*, which lies expressly in the words of the verse under consideration. And in this are two parts.

1. *Self-abhorrence* or dislike. The soul is now wholly displeased with itself, and reflects upon itself with regret and trouble. So the apostle declares it to have been with the Corinthians, when their godly sorrow was working in them. 2 Cor. 7 : 11. Among other things, it wrought in them indignation and revenge; or a reflection on themselves, with all manner of dislike and abhorrence. In the winding up of the controversy between God and Job, this is the point he rests in. As he had come in general to a free, full, ingenuous acknowledgment of sin, chap. 40 : 4, 5; so in particular he gives up his whole contest in this abhorrence of himself, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." "What a vile wretched creature have I been," saith the soul, "I blush and am ashamed to think of my folly, baseness, and ingratitude; is it possible that I should deal thus with the Lord? I abhor, I loathe myself, I would fly any where from myself, I am so vile; a thing to be despised of God, angels and men."

2. There is *self-judging* in it also. This the apostle

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invites the Corinthians to, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." 1 Cor. 11: 31. This is a person's pronouncing sentence on himself, according to the tenor of the law. The soul brings not only its sin, but itself also, to the law. It puts itself, as to merit and desert, under the stroke and severity of it. Hence arises a full justification of God, in what sentence soever he shall be pleased to pronounce in the case before him.

These three things to which attention has now been called, show the state and first actings of a gracious soul rising from its depths. They are all of them signally expressed in Hosea, 14: 1–4, where we have a signal recovery exemplified. And this makes way for the exaltation of grace, the great thing in all this dispensation aimed at by God. Ephes. 1: 6. That which he is now doing, is to bring the soul to "glory in him," which is all the return he hath from his large and infinitely bountiful expense of grace and mercy. Now, nothing can render grace conspicuous and glorious until the soul come to this. Grace will not be high, until the soul be laid very low. And this also prepares the soul for receiving mercy in a sense of pardon, the great thing aimed at on the part of the sinner; and it prepares it for every incumbent duty. This brings the soul to wait on God with diligence and patience. If things presently answer not our expectation, we are ready to think we have done what we can; if it will be no better, we must bear it as we are able; which spirit God abhors. The soul in this state waits the pleasure of God, as we shall see in the close of the psalm. Oh! says such a one, if ever I obtain a sense of love, if ever I enjoy one smile of his countenance more, it is unspeakable grace. It is good for me quietly to wait and hope for his salvation: and it drives the soul to prayer; yea, a soul always in this frame, prays

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always. And there is nothing more evident, than that the want of a thorough engagement in the performance of these duties, is the great cause why so few come off clear from their entanglements all their days. Men heal their wounds slightly; and therefore, after a new painful festering, they are brought into the same condition of restlessness and trouble which they were in before.

But the soul is not to be left in the state just described. There is other work for it, if it intend to come to rest and peace. It hath obtained an eminent advantage for the discovery of forgiveness, in a just sense of sin, the acknowledgment of it, and self-condemnation. But there are two evils which often attend men when they are brought into this state. Some *rest in it*, and press no farther; some *rest upon it*, and suppose that it is all which is required of them.

1. By *resting or staying in it*, I mean the soul's desponding, through discouraging thoughts that deliverance is not to be obtained. Being made deeply sensible of sin, it is so overwhelmed with thoughts of its own vileness and unworthiness as to sink under the burden; such a soul is "afflicted and tossed with tempests, and not comforted;" as in a storm at sea, when all means of contending are gone, men give up themselves to be driven and tossed by the wind and seas at their pleasure. This brought Israel to cry out, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God," Isa. 40:27; and "Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me," chap. 49:14. The soul begins secretly to think there is no hope; God regardeth it not; it shall one day perish; relief is far away, and trouble nigh at hand. These thoughts so oppress them, that though they forsake not God utterly to their own destruction, yet they

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draw not nigh to him effectually to their consolation.

This is the first evil that the soul, in this condition, is enabled to avoid. We know how God rebukes it in Zion: "Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." Isa. 49 : 14. But how foolish is Zion, how froward, how unbelieving in this matter! what ground hath she for such sinful despondencies, such discouraging conclusions? "Can a woman," saith the Lord, "forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, but I will not forget thee." Such a reproof he gives to Jacob upon a similar complaint, chap. 40 : 28, 29, 30. There is nothing more provoking to the Lord, or more disadvantageous to the soul, than such sinful despondency.

It insensibly *weakens the soul and disables it* both for present and future endeavors. Hence some poor creatures mourn, and even pine away in this condition, never getting one step beyond a perplexing sense of sin all their days. Some have dwelt so long upon it, and have so entangled themselves with a multitude of perplexing thoughts, that at length their natural faculties have been weakened, and rendered utterly useless; so that they have lost sense of sin and every thing else. Against some Satan hath taken advantage to cast so many entangling objections into their minds, that their whole time hath been taken up in proposing doubts and objections against themselves; with these they have gone up and down, to one and another, and, being never able to come to a consistency in their own thoughts, have spent all their days in a fruitless, withering, comfortless condition. Some, with whom things come to a better issue, are yet for a season brought to such discomposure of spirit, or are so filled with their own apprehensions, that when things which are most proper to their condition are spoken to them they make no im-

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pression upon them. Thus the soul is weakened by dwelling too long on these considerations; until they cry with those in Ezekiel, 33 : 10, "Our sins are upon us, we pine away in them, and how shall we then live?"

This state of mind will insensibly give countenance to *hard thoughts of God*, and so to repining, and weariness in waiting on him. At first, the soul neither apprehends nor fears any such issue: it supposes that it shall condemn and abhor itself, and justify God, and that for ever; but when relief comes not, this resolution begins to weaken; secret thoughts arise in the heart that God is inexorable; and it sometimes utters such complaints as will bring the soul into new depths before it has an issue of its trials. Here, in humiliation preceding conversion, many convinced persons perish; they cannot wait God's season, and perish under their impatience. Of what the saints of God themselves have been overtaken with in their depths and trials, we have many examples. Delight and expectation are the grounds of our abiding with God; both these are weakened by a conquering prevailing sense of sin, without some relief from the discovery of forgiveness, though at a distance; and therefore our perplexed soul stays not here, but presses on towards that discovery.

2. There is *a resting on* this sense of sin that is noxious and hurtful. Some finding it, with other things that attend it, wrought in them in some measure, begin to think that, now all is well, this is all that is required. They will endeavor to make a life of comfort from such arguments as they can raise from their trouble; they think this a ground of peace, that they have not peace. Here some rest before conversion, and it proves their ruin. Because they are convinced of sin, and troubled about it, and burdened with it, they think it shall be well with them. But were not Cain, Esau, Saul, Ahab, Judas convinced of sin, and burdened with it? Did this profit

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them? Did it interest them in the promises? Did not the wrath of God overtake them notwithstanding? So it is with many daily; they think their conviction is conversion, and that their sins are pardoned, because they have been troubled.

But this is really a fruit of *self-righteousness*. For a soul to place the spring of its peace or comfort in any thing of its own, is to fall short of Christ. We must not only be justified, but glory in him also. Isaiah, 45 : 25. Men may make use of the evidence of their graces, but only as means to a farther end; not as the rest of the soul in the least, for this deprives men's very humiliation of all gospel-humility. True humility consists more in believing than in being sensible of sin. In believing the soul truly empties and abases itself. A sense of sin may consist with an obstinate resolution to scramble for something upon the account of self-endeavors.

Though an evangelical sense of sin be a grace, yet it is not the *uniting grace which interests us in Christ;* it is not that which peculiarly and in its own nature exalts him. There is in this sense of sin that which is natural, and that which is spiritual. The former consists in sorrow, trouble, self-abasement, dejection, anxiety of mind: of these I may say, as the apostle of afflictions, they are not joyous, but grievous. In their own nature they are no more than the soul's retreat into itself, with an abhorrence of the objects of its sorrow and grief. To stop here is to sit down short of Christ, whether it be for life or consolation.

Let there be no mistake. There can be no evangelical sense of sin, and humiliation, where there is no union with Christ. Zech. 12 : 10. The sense of sin in itself, and in its own nature, is not availing. Christ is the only rest of our souls. In any thing, for any end or purpose to take up short of him, is to lose it. It is not enough that we be "prisoners of hope," but we must

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"turn to our strong-hold," Zech. 9 : 12; not enough that we are "weary and laden," but we "must come to Him." Matt. 11 : 28, 29. It will not suffice that we are weak, and know that we are weak, but we must "take hold on the strength of God." Isaiah, 27 : 5.

Indeed, *pressing after forgiveness* is the very life and power of evangelical humiliation. How shall a man know that his humiliation is evangelical, that his sorrow is according to God? He does not do as Cain did, who cried his sins were greater than he could bear, and so departed from the presence of God; nor as Judas did, who repented, and hanged himself; nor as Felix did, tremble for a while, and then return to his lusts; nor as the Jews did, in the prophet, "pine away under their iniquities," because of vexation of heart; nor doth he divert his thoughts to other things, thereby to relieve his soul in his trouble; nor fix upon a righteousness of his own; nor slothfully lie down under his perplexity; but in the midst of it he applies himself to God in Christ for pardon and mercy. And *it is the soul's application unto God for forgiveness, and not its sense of sin*, that gives to God the glory of his grace.

CHAPTER IV.

DISCOVERY OF FORGIVENESS.

"*But there is forgiveness with Thee, that thou mayest be feared.*" Verse 4.

FORGIVENESS is from a Hebrew word signifying to spare, to pardon, to be propitious, in opposition to a similar word meaning to cut off and destroy. Jerome, with the Septuagint, renders it "propitiation," which

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implies more than pardon. The word is constantly applied to sin, and expresses every thing that concurs to its pardon or remission.

It implies the mind and will of pardoning, or God's gracious readiness to forgive. "Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive;" that is, benign and meek, or sparing and propitious. It also regards the act of pardoning, or actual forgiveness itself. "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;" actually discharges thee of them. This is the word God uses in the covenant, in that great promise of grace and pardon, Jer. 31 : 34. It is warrantable for us, yea, necessary, to take the word in the utmost extent of its signification and use. It is a word of favor, and requires an interpretation tending towards the enlargement of it. We see it may be rendered propitiation, or grace; and also pardon; and may denote these three things:

The gracious, tender, *merciful heart and will of God*, who is the God of pardons and forgiveness.

A respect unto Jesus Christ, the only *propitiation* for sin, as he is expressly called, Rom. 3 : 25; 1 John, 2 : 2, mediating between the gracious heart of God and the actual pardon of sinners: all forgiveness is founded on propitiation.

It also denotes condonation, or *forgiveness, as we are made partakers of it:* comprising it both actively, as it is an act of grace in God; and passively, as terminated in our souls, with the deliverance that attends it. In this sense, as it looks downwards, and in its effects respects us, it is of mere grace; and as it looks upwards to its causes, and respects the Lord Christ, it is from propitiation, or atonement, as this is that pardon which is administered in the covenant of grace.

The import of these words in their connection in this psalm, and their relation to the state of the soul here mentioned, seems to be this:

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"Although, O Lord, no man can approach unto thee, or stand before thee, if thou shouldst mark his sins and follies according to the tenor of the law, nor could he serve so great and holy a God; yet because I know, from thy revelation of it, that there is also with thee, on account of Jesus Christ the propitiation, pardon and forgiveness, I am encouraged to continue with thee, waiting on thee, worshipping thee; when, without this discovery, I should rather choose to have rocks and mountains fall upon me to hide me from thy presence. But THERE IS FORGIVENESS WITH THEE, and therefore thou shalt be feared."

From the words thus unfolded the ensuing propositions arise:

Faith's discovery of forgiveness in God, though it have no present sense of its own peculiar interest therein, is the great support of a sin-perplexed soul.

Gospel-forgiveness, the discovery of which is the sole support of sin-distressed souls, relates to the gracious heart or good-will of the Father, the God of forgiveness; the propitiation made by the blood of the Son; and free pardon, according to the covenant of grace.

Faith's discovery of forgiveness in God is the sole foundation of adherence to him, in acceptable worship and reverential obedience.

My immediate aim is to confirm and illustrate the first of these propositions. I therefore proceed to show:

That there is not the least encouragement to a sinner to deal with God without this discovery of forgiveness in him;

That this discovery is a matter great, holy and mysterious, and which few, on gospel-abiding grounds, attain to;

That yet this is a great, sacred and infallible truth; and

That it is a stable support to a sin-distressed soul.

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There is not THE LEAST ENCOURAGEMENT *for a sinner' approaching God without this discovery.* All else is cov ered with a deluge of wrath; this is the only ark where the soul may repair and find rest; all without it is darkness, curse and terror.

We have an instance of it in Adam. When he knew himself to be a sinner, and it was impossible for him to discover forgiveness with God, he laid aside all thoughts of treating with him; the best of his foolish contrivance was for an escape, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and was *afraid*, because I was naked; and I *hid* myself." Gen. 3: 10. Nothing but, Thou shalt die the death, sounded in his ears. In the morning of that day he had converse and communion with God, with boldness and peace; why then does nothing but *fear*, flying, *hiding*, now possess him? Adam had sinned; the promise was not yet given; no revelation was made of forgiveness in God; and what other course, than that vain and foolish one, to fix upon, he knew not. No more can any of his posterity, without this revelation. Whatever has been the resort of any one, it has been no less foolish than his hiding; and in most, more pernicious. When Cain had received his sentence from God, it is said, "He went out from the presence of the Lord." Gen. 4: 16. From his providential presence he could never withdraw himself; so the Psalmist informs us at large. Psalm 139: 7–9.

The very heathen knew, by the light of nature, that guilt could never drive men out of the reach of God. They knew that the vengeance of God would not spare sinners, nor could it be avoided. Acts, 28: 4. From God's gracious presence, which Cain never enjoyed, he could not depart. It was, then, God's presence as to his worship, and all outward acts of communion, that he forsook and departed from. He had no discovery by faith of forgiveness, and therefore resolved to have no

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more to do with God, or those who cleaved to him.

"The sinners in Zion are afraid, fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites; who among us shall dwell with devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Isaiah, 33 : 14. The persons spoken of are sinners, great sinners, and hypocrites; conviction of sin, and the desert of sin, was fallen upon them; a light to discern forgiveness they had not; they apprehend God only as devouring fire and everlasting burnings—one that would not spare, but would assuredly inflict punishment according to the desert of sin; and hence there was no abiding, no enduring his presence.

The condition into which this consideration brings the souls of sinners when conviction grows strong upon them, the Holy Ghost declares, Micah, 6 : 6, 7. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Sense of sin presseth, forgiveness is not discovered, and how does the poor creature perplex itself in vain to find out a way of dealing with God! Will a sedulous and diligent observation of his own ordinances and institutions relieve me? "shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, and calves of a year old?" Alas! thou art a sinner, and these sacrifices cannot make thee perfect, or acquit thee! Heb. 10 : 1. Shall I do more than ever he required of any of the sons of men? "O that I had thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil, to offer him!" Alas! if thou hadst all the bulls and goats in the world, it is not possible that their blood should take away sin. ver 4. But I have heard of them who have snatched away their own children from their mothers' breasts, and cast them into the fire until they were

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consumed, so to pacify their conscience in expiating the guilt of their iniquities: shall I take this course? will it relieve me? Am I ready to part with my first-born into the fire, so that I may have deliverance from my transgressions? Alas! to accept of such offerings never entered the heart of God. And so is it still as to any duties man can perform. Where there is no discovery of forgiveness they will yield the soul no relief, no support; God is not to be treated with upon such terms. Hence,

THIS DISCOVERY OF FORGIVENESS IN GOD IS GREAT, holy, and mysterious, and which very few on gospel-grounds attain to.

All men indeed say there is forgiveness; and most men are persuaded that they think so; only men in great and desperate extremities, like Cain or Spira, seem to call it into question. But their thoughts are empty, yea, for the most part, wicked and atheistical. They think that "God is altogether such an one as themselves;" that indeed he takes little or no care about sin, but passes it over as lightly as they do. In the progress of this work I shall show that, notwithstanding all their pretences, the most of men never had, indeed, any real discovery of forgiveness, and point out the difference between their vain credulity and a gracious gospel-discovery of forgiveness in God. This discovery includes both the revelation of it made by God, and our understanding and reception of that revelation to our own advantage.

The grounds of the difficulty of making this discovery consist partly in THE HINDERANCES that lie in the way of it; and partly in the nature of the thing discovered: of both which I shall briefly treat.

1. The constant voice of *conscience* lies against the

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discovery of forgiveness. Conscience, if not seared, inexorably condemns, and pronounces wrath on the soul that has the least guilt cleaving to it. It lies close to the soul, and by importunity and loud speaking it will be heard. It will make the whole soul attend, or it will speak like thunder. And its constant voice is, that where there is guilt there must be judgment. Rom. 2 : 14, 15. Conscience naturally knows nothing of forgiveness; yea, it is against its very work and office, to hear any thing of it. If a man of courage and honesty be intrusted to keep a garrison against an enemy, let one come and tell him that peace is made between those whom he serves and their enemies, so that he may leave his guard, and set open the gates, and cease his watchfulness; how wary will he be, lest, under this pretence, he be betrayed! No, saith he, I will keep my post until I have express orders from my superiors. Conscience is intrusted with the power of God in the soul of a sinner, with command to keep all in subjection, with reference to the judgment to come; it will not betray its trust, in believing every report of peace. No! it says, and speaks in the name of God: "Guilt and punishment are inseparable;" if the soul sin, God will judge. What tell you me of forgiveness? I know what my commission is, and that I will abide by; you shall not bring a superior commander into my trust.

Now, whom should a man believe, if not his own conscience? which, as it will not flatter him, so it intends not to affright him—but to speak the truth as the matter requires. Conscience has two works in reference to sin; one to condemn the acts of sin, another to judge the person of the sinner; both with reference to the judgment of God. When *forgiveness* comes, it would sever these offices, and take one of them out of the hand of conscience; it will condemn the sin; but it shall no more condemn the sinner, he shall be freed

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from its sentence. Here conscience labors to keep its whole dominion, and to keep the power of forgiveness from being enthroned in the soul.

Nor indeed is it any easy work to deal with it. The apostle tells us, that all the sacrifices of the law could not do it, Heb. 10:2; they could not bring a man into that state in which he should have "no more conscience of sin;" that is, conscience condemning the person; for conscience, in causing a sense of sin, and the condemnation of it, is never to be taken away. And this can be no otherwise done but by the blood of Christ, as the apostle at large there declares.

It is no easy thing, then, to make a discovery of forgiveness to a soul, when conscience lies in opposition to it. Hence is the soul's great desire to establish its own righteousness, whereby its natural principles may be preserved in their power. Let self-righteousness be enthroned, and natural conscience desires no more; it is satisfied, and pacified. The law it knows, but as for forgiveness it says, Whence is it? Unto the utmost, until Christ perfects his conquest, there are, on this account, secret strugglings in the heart against free pardon in the Gospel, and fluctuations of mind about it. Yea, hence are the doubts and fears of believers themselves: they are nothing but the strivings of conscience to keep its whole dominion, to condemn the sinner as well as the sin. More or less, it keeps up its pretensions against the Gospel whilst we live in this world. It is a great work that the blood of Christ hath to do upon the conscience of a sinner; for whereas it hath a power, and claims a right, to condemn both sin and sinner, the one part of this power is to be cleared, strengthened, made more active, vigorous and watchful; the other to be taken quite away: it shall now see more sins than formerly, more of the vileness of all sins than formerly, and condemn them with more ab-

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norrence than ever, upon more and more glorious accounts than formerly; but it is also made to see an interposition between these sins and the person of the sinner who hath committed them; which is no small or ordinary work.

2. *The law* lies against this discovery of forgiveness. The law is a beam of the holiness of God himself; what it speaks to us, it speaks in the name and authority of God.

It is certain that *the law knows neither mercy nor forgiveness.* Its very sanction lies wholly against forgiveness: "The soul that sinneth shall die. Cursed is he that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." Ezek. 18 : 4; Deut. 27 : 26. Hence the apostle pronounces universally, without exception, that they who are "under the law are under the curse," Gal. 3 : 10; and, saith he, verse 12, "The law is not of faith." There is an inconsistency between the law and believing; they cannot have their abode in power together. Do this, and live; fail, and die; is the constant immutable voice of the law. This it speaks in general to all, and this in particular to every one.

And further, the sinner seems to have *manifold and weighty reasons* to attend to the voice of this law, and to acquiesce in its sentence. For,

The law is *connatural* to him; his domestic, his old acquaintance: it came into the world with him, and hath grown up with him from his infancy; it was implanted in his heart by nature; he can never shake it off, or part with it. It is his familiar, his friend, that cleaves to him as the flesh to the bone; so that they who have not the law written, cannot but "show forth the work of the law," Rom. 2 : 14, 15, and that because the law itself is inbred in them, and all the faculties of the soul are at peace with it, in subjection to it. It is the bond of their union, harmony and correspondence

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among themselves, in all their moral actings; it gives life, order, motion to them all. Now, the Gospel, which comes to control this sentence of the law, and to relieve the sinner from it, is foreign to his nature, a strange thing to him, a thing he hath no acquaintance or familiarity with; it hath not been bred up with him; nor is there any thing in him to side with it, to make a party for it, or plead in its behalf.

Again, the law speaks nothing to a sinner but what his conscience assures him to be true. There is a constant *concurrence* in the testimony of the law and conscience. When the law says, this or that is a sin worthy of death, conscience says, it is even so: and where the law of itself, as being a general rule, rests, conscience helps it on, and says, of this and that sin worthy of death, is the soul guilty: then die, saith the law, as thou hast deserved. Now, this must have a mighty efficacy to prevail with the soul to give credit to the testimony of the law; it speaks not one word but what he has a witness to within himself. These witnesses always agree; and so it seems to be established for a truth, that there is no forgiveness.

The law, also, though it speaks against the soul's interest, yet speaks nothing but what is so just, righteous and equal, that it forces the soul's consent. So Paul tells us, that men "know this voice of the law to be the judgment of God." Rom. 1:32. They know it, and cannot but consent to it, that it is the judgment of God,—that it is good, righteous, equal. And indeed what can be more righteous than its sentence? It commands obedience to the God of life and death, promises a reward, and declares, that for non-performance of duty death will be inflicted. These terms are good, righteous, holy; the soul accepts them, and knows not what it can desire better or more just. This the apostle insists upon, Rom. 7:12, 13. "Wherefore

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the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good; was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid: but sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." Wherever the blame falls, the soul cannot but acquit the law, and confess that what it says is right. Now, though the authority and credit of a witness may go very far in a doubtful matter, when there is a concurrence of more witnesses it strengthens the testimony; but nothing is so prevalent to beget belief, as when the things spoken are themselves just and good, not liable to any reasonable exception. And so is it in this case; unto the authority of the law, and concurrence of conscience, is added the reasonableness and equity of the thing itself, even in the judgment of the sinner; namely, that every sin shall be punished, and every transgression receive a meet recompense of reward.

But yet farther: what the law says, it speaks *in the name and authority of God:* what it says, then, must be believed, or we make God a liar. It comes not in its own name, but in the name of Him who appointed it. You will say then, Is it so indeed? Is there no forgiveness with God? for this is the constant voice of the law, which you say speaks in the name and authority of God, and is therefore to be believed. I answer briefly, with the apostle, "What the law speaks, it speaks to them that are under the law:" it doth not speak to them that are in Christ, whom the "law of the Spirit of life hath set free from the law of sin and death." But to them that are under the law it speaks, and it speaks the very truth; and it speaks in the name of God, and its testimony is to be received. It says there is no forgiveness in God to them that are under the law; and they that flatter themselves with a contrary persuasion, will find themselves wofully mistaken at the great day.

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From these and similar considerations, I say, there seems a great deal of reason why the soul should conclude that it will be according to the testimony of the law, and that he shall not find forgiveness. Law and conscience close together, and insinuate themselves into the mind and judgment of a sinner. They strengthen the testimony of one another, and greatly prevail. If any are otherwise minded, I leave them to the trial: if ever God awakened their consciences to a thorough performance of their duty, if ever he opened their souls and let in the light and power of the law upon them, they will find it no small work to grapple with them. I am sure that generally they prevail so far, that, in the preaching of the Gospel, we have great cause to say, "Lord, who hath believed our report?" We come with our report of forgiveness, but who believes it? by whom is it received? Neither do the light, or conscience, or conversation of most men allow us to suppose it is embraced.

The *prevalent impressions of men, concerning the nature and justice of God*, also lie against this discovery. There are in all men by nature, indelible impressions of the holiness and purity of God, of his justice and hatred of sin, of his invariable righteousness in the government of the world. Their inward thought is, that God is an avenger of sin; that it belongs to his government of the world, his holiness and righteousness, to take care that every sin be punished. All men know, as already observed, Rom. 1 : 32, that it is a righteous thing with God to render tribulation to sinners. From thence is that fear which surprises men at an apprehension of the presence of God; or of any thing that may seem to come on his errand. This notion, of God's avenging all sin, exerts itself secretly, but effectually. So Adam trembled, and hid himself: and it was the saying of old, "I have seen God, and shall die." When men are under

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any dreadful providence, thunderings, lightnings, tempests, or in darkness, they tremble, not so much at what they see, or hear, or feel, as from their secret thoughts that God is nigh, and that he is a consuming fire.

Now, these inbred notions lie universally against all apprehensions of forgiveness; which must be brought into the soul from without, having no principle of nature to promote them.

Thus it appears that a real, solid discovery of forgiveness is indeed a great work; many difficulties and hinderances lie in the way of its accomplishment.

We proceed to expose some of the FALSE PRESUMPTIONS OF FORGIVENESS, with which men deceive themselves. It may be objected as to the considerations just adduced, that we find men abundantly ready to expect forgiveness from God. What so common as, "God is merciful?" Are not the convictions of most men stifled by this soothing apprehension? Is it not a common complaint, that men presume on it to their eternal ruin?

I answer, the folly of poor souls in their presuming on forgiveness, can never be enough lamented; it is one thing to embrace a cloud, a shadow, and another to have the truth in reality. I shall hereafter show the true nature of forgiveness, and wherein it consists, whereby the vanity of this self-deceiving will be exposed. It will appear in the issue, that notwithstanding all their pretensions, the most of men know nothing at all, or not any thing to the purpose, of true forgiveness. I therefore proceed to show, in some few observations, how far this delusion of many differs from a true gospel-discovery of forgiveness.

An atheistical presumption that God is not so just and holy, or not just and holy in such a manner as he is represented, is the ground on which multitudes persuade themselves of forgiveness. Men think that some declara-

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tions of God are fitted only to make them mad: that he takes little notice of their sins, and those he does notice, he will easily pass by, as they suppose better becomes him. Come, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Their inward thought is, "The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil," which, says the Psalmist, is men's "thinking that God is such a one as themselves." Psalm 50: 21. They have no deep nor serious thoughts of his greatness, holiness, purity, severity, but think he is like themselves, so far as not to be much moved with what they do. What thoughts they have of sin, the same they think God has. If, with them, a slight ejaculation be enough to expiate sin so that their consciences are no more troubled, they think the same is enough with God, so that it will not be punished. The generality of men make light of sin; and he that has slight thoughts of sin, had never great thoughts of God. Indeed, men's undervaluing of sin arises from their contempt of God. The evil of sin flows from its relation to God; and as men's apprehensions are of God, so will they be of sin. This is the state of most men; they know little of God, and are little troubled about any thing that relates to him. God is not reverenced, sin is but a trifle, forgiveness a matter of nought; whoso will, may have it for asking! But *shall this atheistical wickedness of the heart of man be accounted a discovery of forgiveness?* Is not this to make God an idol? He who is not acquainted with God's holiness and purity, who knows not sin's desert and sinfulness, knows nothing of forgiveness.

From the doctrines of the Gospel commonly preached there is also a *vague notion* in the minds of men that God is ready to forgive—a mere speculative apprehension of this truth, without any real satisfactory foundation of that apprehension as to themselves. This they have heard, this they have been often told, and a general persuasion spreads itself over all to whom the sound

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of the Gospel comes. It is not a real reception of the Gospel, but is an opinion growing out of the report of it. Hence I shall briefly show the DIFFERENCES between this common prevailing apprehension of forgiveness and faith's discovery of it to the soul in its power.

1. The prevailing apprehension is *loose and vague*—a truth received speculatively, and not in its power. It wants fixedness and foundation; which defects accompany all notions of the mind that are only retained in the memory, not implanted in the judgment. They hear that God is merciful, and as such they intend to deal with him. For the true foundation on which the pure and holy God, who will do no iniquity—the righteous God, whose judgment it is, that they who commit sin are worthy of death—should yet pardon iniquity, they weigh not, they consider not. They take it for granted that so it is; and never seriously inquire how it comes to be so; and that because they have no real concern about it. How many thousands may we meet, who take it for granted that forgiveness is to be had with God, and yet never had any serious exercise in their souls about the grounds of it, and its consistency with his holiness and justice! But those who know it by faith, have a sense of it fixed particularly and distinctly on their minds. They have ascertained the grounds of it in Christ; so that, on a good and unquestionable foundation, they can go to God and say, "There is forgiveness with thee." They see how more glory comes to God by forgiveness than by punishing sin; which is a matter that the other sort of men are not at all solicitous about. If they may escape punishment, whether God have any glory or not, for the most part they are indifferent.

2. Those who indulge this false apprehension, *have not been brought by the power of their convictions and distress of conscience to make the earnest inquiry* whether

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this be so. Their confidence is not the result of a deep inquiry after peace and rest; it is antecedent to trial and experience; and so is not faith, but opinion. For although faith be not experience, it is inseparable from it. Distress in the conscience has been prevented by this opinion, not removed. The reason why most men are not troubled about their sins to any purpose, is a persuasion that God is merciful and will pardon; when, indeed, none can really, on gospel-grounds, have that persuasion, but those who have been deeply troubled for sin. Those who make this discovery by faith have had conflicts in their own spirits, and, being deprived of peace, have made diligent search whether forgiveness were to be obtained. The persuasion they have of it, be it more or less, is the issue of a trial they have had in their own souls, of an inquiry how things stood between God and them, as to their acceptance with him.

This is a vast difference: the one class might possibly have had trouble in their consciences about sin, had it not been for their opinion of forgiveness: this has prevented or stifled their convictions, not healed their wounds, which is the work of the Gospel; but it has kept them from being wounded, and lulled them into security. Yea, here lies the ruin of most who perish under the preaching of the Gospel: they have received the general notion of pardon; it floats in their minds, and promptly presents itself to their relief on all occasions. Does God at any time, in the dispensation of the word, under an affliction, or the outbreaking of some heinous sin, begin to deal with their conscience; before their conviction can ripen they choke it, and heal their conscience with this notion of pardon. Many a man, between the house of God and his dwelling, is thus cured. You may see them go away shaking their heads, and striking on their breasts, and, before they come home, be as whole as ever: "Well! God is merciful, there is

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pardon," hath wrought the cure. But the other class have obtained their persuasion as a result of the discovery of Christ in the Gospel, upon a full conviction.

3. These delusive hopes of forgiveness work no love to God, no delight in him, no reverence of him. None deal worse with God than those who have an ungrounded persuasion of forgiveness; and if they seem to fear him, or love him, or obey him in any thing, it is from other motives and considerations, which will not render any thing they do acceptable. Carnal boldness, formality, and despising of God, are the common issues of such a persuasion. Indeed, this is the generation of great sinners in the world; men who have a general apprehension, but not a sense of the special power of pardon. Where faith makes a discovery of forgiveness, all things are otherwise. Great love, fear, and reverence of God are its attendants. Mary Magdalen loved much, because much was forgiven. Great love will spring out of great forgiveness. "There is forgiveness with thee, (saith the Psalmist,) that thou mayest be feared." No unbeliever truly and experimentally knows the truth of this inference.

4. This delusive apprehension of the pardon of sin begets *no serious thorough hatred and detestation of sin*, but rather secretly insinuates into the soul encouragement to continue in it. It tends to lessen and extenuate sin, and to support the soul against its convictions. So Jude tells us, that some "turn the grace of God into lasciviousness." But how can they do this? Will what was once grace ever become wantonness? It is their perversion of the *doctrine* of grace, not of real grace, that is intended. The doctrine of forgiveness may be thus abused. From hence do men, who have only a general notion of it, habitually draw secret encouragements to sin and folly. Paul informs us that carnal men are very apt to make such conclusions. Rom. 6 : 1. And it

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will appear at the last day, how unspeakably this glorious grace has been perverted in the world. It would be well for many if they had never heard the name of forgiveness. It is otherwise where this revelation is received indeed in the soul by believing. Rom. 6 : 14. Our being under grace, under the power of the belief of forgiveness, is our great preservative from being under the power of sin. Faith of forgiveness is the principle of gospel obedience. Titus, 2 : 11, 12.

5. This vague notion of forgiveness *brings with it no sweetness, no rest to the soul.* Flashes of joy it may, abiding rest it doth not. The truth of the doctrine fluctuates to and fro in the minds of those that have it, but their wills and affections have no solid delight nor rest by it. Hence, notwithstanding all the professions made in the world, of forgiveness, most men ultimately seek for peace and comfort from themselves. Every one, in his several ways, pleases himself with what he does in answer to his own convictions, and is disquieted as to his state according as he seems to himself to come short of the mark he had fixed. One duty yields him more repose than many thoughts of forgiveness. But faith finds sweetness and rest in forgiveness with God: it is the only harbor of the soul: it leads a man to God, to Christ as his rest. Fading vanishing joys do oft-times attend the one; but solid delight, and constant obedience, are the fruits of the other only.

6. Those who have the former only, take up their persuasion *on false grounds, and cannot but use it to false ends and purposes.* Self-righteousness is their dependence, and when that is too short or too narrow to cover them, they piece it out by forgiveness. Where conscience accuses, this must supply the defect. Faith, on the contrary, lays it on its proper foundation, and uses it to its proper end, as the sole and only ground of our acceptance with God. That is the proper use

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of forgiveness, that all may be of grace; for when the foundation is pardon, the whole superstructure must be grace. Thus it is evident that, notwithstanding the pretences to the contrary, insinuated in the objection now removed, it is a great thing to have gospel-forgiveness discovered to a soul in a saving manner.

CHAPTER V.

NATURE OF FORGIVENESS.

I now proceed to inquire into the nature of that pardon which poor convinced troubled souls seek after, and which the Scriptures propose to them, for their relief and rest. And, as before, I shall not treat the subject absolutely or abstractly, but in its practical relation to the truth we have been considering: that it is a great thing to attain to a true gospel-discovery of forgiveness.

I. As already shown, forgiveness has relation to THE GRACIOUS HEART OF THE FATHER; including both the infinite goodness and graciousness of his nature, and the sovereign purpose of his will and grace. *The infinite goodness of his nature* is here exhibited. Sin stands in contrariety to God: it is rebellion against his sovereignty, opposition to his holiness, a provocation to his justice, a rejection of his yoke, a casting off of the creature's dependence on its Creator. That God, then, should have pity and compassion on sinners, in every one of whose sins there is inconceivably more evil than we can comprehend, argues an infinitely gracious nature in him.

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That this is the head or spring from which forgiveness flows, is manifest from this solemn proclamation which he made of old of his name, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." Exod. 34 : 6, 7. Having made this known to be his name, and thereby declared his nature, he, in many places, proposes it as a relief, a refuge for sinners, an encouragement to come to him, and to wait for mercy from him. "They that know thy name, will put their trust in thee," Psalm 9 : 10; others have no foundation for their confidence. But if this name of God be indeed made known to us by the Holy Ghost, why should we not repair to him, and rest upon him? So Isaiah, 1 : 10. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." Not only sinners, but sinners in great distress, who walk in darkness, are here spoken to, and called "to trust in the name of the Lord." I have shown that nothing but forgiveness is of use to one in distress on account of sin; yet is such an one here sent to the NAME of the Lord, wherein his gracious heart and nature is revealed. That, then, is the very fountain and spring of forgiveness, and what John would impress a sense of upon our souls, where he tells us that "God is love." Infinite goodness and grace is the soil wherein forgiveness grows. It is impossible that this flower should spring from any other root; unless this be revealed to the soul, forgiveness is not revealed. To consider pardon merely as it is terminated on ourselves, not as it flows from God, will bring neither profit to us nor glory to God.

This discovery of forgiveness, in God, is, as we have said, no common thing, it is a great discovery. Let

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men come, with a sense of the guilt of sin, to have deep and serious thoughts of God, and they will find it no easy matter truly and thoroughly to apprehend this loving and gracious nature of God, in reference to pardon. Though men profess that God is gracious, yet their aversion to him and communion with him, abundantly manifests that they do not believe what they say: if they did, they could not but delight and trust in him, for "they that know his name will put their trust in him." So the slothful servant in the Gospel said, "I knew that thou wast austere," and not for me to deal with; it may be he professed otherwise before, but that lay in his heart when it came to the trial. But this, I say, is necessary to those to whom this discovery is to be made—even a spiritual apprehension of the gracious, loving heart and nature of God. This is the spring of all that follows; and the fountain must be infinitely sweet from which such streams do flow. He that considers the glorious fabric of heaven and earth, with the things contained in them, must conclude that they were the product of "infinite wisdom and power;" and he that really considers forgiveness, and looks on it with a spiritual eye, must conclude that it comes from infinite goodness and grace. "Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive." Psalm 86 : 5. "Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." Nehem. 9 : 17. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?—because he delighteth in mercy." Micah, 7 : 18. When a sinner is in good earnest seeking after forgiveness, there is nothing he is more solicitous about than the heart of God towards him; nothing that he more labors to discover; there is nothing that sin and Satan labor more to hide from him; this he rolls in his mind, and exercises his thoughts about; and if ever that voice of God, "Fury is not in me," sound in his heart, he is relieved from his great distresses.

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This fear of our hearts our Savior seems to intend to prevent or remove, John, 16 : 26, 27. "I say not that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you." The disciples had good thoughts of the tender heart and care of Christ himself, the Mediator, towards them: but what is the heart of the Father, what acceptance shall they find with him? Will Christ pray that they may find favor with him? Why, saith he, as to the love of his heart, there is no need of it; "for the Father himself loveth you." If this, then, belongs to forgiveness, as whoever has sought for it well knows, it is certainly no common discovery to have it revealed to us.

To have all the clouds and darkness raised by sin, between us and the throne of God, dispelled; to have the fire, and storms, and tempests, that are kindled and stirred up about him by the law, removed; to have his glorious face unveiled, and his holy heart laid open, and a view of those infinite treasures and stores of goodness, mercy, love, and kindness, which have had an unchangeable habitation therein from all eternity; to have a discovery of these eternal springs of forbearance and forgiveness, is what none but Christ can accomplish. John, 17 : 6. But this is not all.

This eternal ocean of divine love, that is infinitely satisfied with its own fulness and perfection, does not naturally yield forth streams for our refreshment. Mercy and pardon do not come forth from God, as light from the sun, or water from the sea, by a necessary consequence of their natures, whether they will or not. It does not necessarily follow that any one must be made partaker of forgiveness because God is infinitely gracious: for may he not do what he will with his own? "Who hath given first unto him, that it should be recompensed unto him again?" Rom. 11 : 35. All the fruits of God's goodness and grace are in the sole keeping of his own

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sovereign will and pleasure. This is his great glory, Exod. 33 : 18, 19. "Show me thy glory," saith Moses. "And he said, I will make all my goodness to pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee ; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious." Upon that proclamation of the name of God, that he is "merciful, gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness," some might conclude, that it could not but be well with all ; nay, saith he, but this is my great glory, that "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious." There must be an interposition of a free act of the will of God, to deal with us according to this his abundant goodness, or we can have no interest therein. This I call *the purpose of his grace*, or the "good pleasure that he hath purposed in himself," Eph. 1 : 9 ; or, as it is termed, ver. 5, 6, "the good pleasure of his will, that he hath purposed, to the praise of his glorious grace."

This free and gracious pleasure of God, or purpose of his will to act according to his own abundant goodness, is another thing that influences the forgiveness of which we treat. Pardon flows immediately from a sovereign act of free grace. This free purpose of God's will and grace, for the pardoning of sinners, is indeed that which is principally intended, when we say, "There is forgiveness with him ;" that is, he is pleased to forgive ; and so to do is agreeable to his nature. Now, the mystery of this grace is deep, it is eternal, and therefore incomprehensible. Few there are whose hearts are raised to a contemplation of it. Men rest and content themselves in a general notion of mercy, which will not be advantageous to their souls : freed they would be from punishment, but what it is to be forgiven they inquire not. But these fountains of God's actings are revealed, that they may be the fountains of our comforts.

II. Now, of this PURPOSE OF GOD'S GRACE, there are several acts, all of them relating to gospel-forgiveness.

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1. There is his purpose of *sending his Son* to be the great means of procuring, of purchasing forgiveness. Though God be infinitely gracious, though he purpose to exert this grace and goodness towards sinners, yet he will do it in such a way as shall not be prejudicial to his own holiness and righteousness. His justice must be satisfied, and his holy indignation against sin made known; wherefore he sent his Son, to make way for the exercise of mercy, so as no way to eclipse the glory of his justice, holiness, and hatred of sin. Better we should all eternally come short of forgiveness, than that God should lose any thing of his glory. This we have, Rom. 3 : 25. "God set Him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past." The remission of sins is the thing aimed at; but this must be brought about, that not only the mercy, but the righteousness of God may be declared; and therefore it must be brought forth by a propitiation, or atonement in the blood of Christ. So John, 3 : 16; 1 John, 4 : 9; Rom. 5 : 8

Men who have slight thoughts of God, whose hearts were never awed with his majesty or greatness, who never seriously considered his purity and holiness, may think it no great matter that God should pardon sin. But do they consider the way in which it was brought about? even by the sending of his only Son, and that to die. Neither was there any other way whereby it might be done. Oh how little is this really believed, even by those who make a profession of it! and what mean thoughts are entertained about it, when men seek for pardon! Freedom from punishment is the utmost that lies in the aims and desires of most, and is all that they consider when they deal with God about sin. Such men think we have an easy task in hand to prove that there is forgiveness in God; but if ever they come to search after it indeed, to inquire into the nature, reasons, causes,

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fountain, and springs of it, they will be able to give another account of these things. Christ is the centre of the mystery of the Gospel, and forgiveness is laid up in the heart of Christ, from the love of the Father; in him are all the treasures of it hid. And surely it is no small thing to have the heart of Christ revealed unto us. When believers look for pardon, their faith fastens on this, that God, with whom the soul hath to do, hath, for this end, sent the Lord Christ to die. General notions of impunity they dwell not on, they have a closer converse with God than to be satisfied with such thoughts. They inquire into the graciousness of his nature, and the good pleasure of his will, the purpose of his grace; they ponder, and look into the mystery of his wisdom and love in sending his Son. If these springs be not clear to them, the streams will yield but little refreshment. It is not enough that we seek after salvation, but we are to inquire and search diligently into the nature and manner of it. These are things that the "angels desire to bow down and look into." 1 Pet 1 : 11–13. And it is, doubtless, one reason why many, who truly believe, do yet so fluctuate about forgiveness all their days, that they never exercised faith to look into the springs of it, its eternal fountains, but have merely dwelt on actual pardon.

2. There is another sovereign act of God's will to be here considered: his eternal designation of those *who shall be made partakers of this mercy*. He hath not left this thing to hazard and uncertainties, that it should, as it were, be unknown to him who should be pardoned, and who not. Nay, none are made partakers of forgiveness but those whom he hath eternally and graciously designed thereunto. So the apostle declares, Eph. 1 : 5–7 The rise is his eternal purpose; the end, the glory of his grace; the means, redemption in the blood of Christ; the thing itself, forgiveness of sins.

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III. Forgiveness has respect, as already said, to the PROPITIATION MADE IN AND BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST, the Son of God. Indeed here lies the knot and centre of gospel-forgiveness: it flows from the cross, and springs out of the grave of Christ.

Thus Elihu describes it: "God is gracious to him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom." Job, 33 : 24. These words contain a summary of our whole subject. 1. God's gracious and merciful heart towards a sinner: "He is gracious unto him." 2. Actual forgiveness: "Deliver him from going down to the pit." And, 3. There is the centre of the whole, wherein God's gracious heart and actual pardon meet; the ransom, the propitiation or atonement, in the blood of Christ, of which we now speak, "I have found a ransom."

The same is expressed, "My righteous servant shall justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities." Isaiah, 53 : 11. Of the justification of sinners, absolution, or pardon, is the first part. This arises from Christ's bearing their iniquities: therein he "finished the transgression, made an end of sin, and made reconciliation for iniquity." Dan. 9 : 24. All the sacrifices, and consequently, the whole worship of the Old Testament, evinced this relation between forgiveness and blood-shedding; whence the apostle concludes, that "without shedding of blood there is no remission," Heb. 9 : 22; that is, all pardon arises from blood-shedding, even of the blood of the Son of God. So that we are said, in him, to have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins. Eph. 1 : 7. Our redemption in his blood, is our forgiveness. Not that we are all actually pardoned in the blood of his cross; for thereunto must be added gospel-forgiveness, but thereby it is procured, the grant of pardon is therein sealed, and security given that it shall, in due time, be made to us. To which purpose is that discourse of the apostle, Rom. 3 : 24, 25, 26. The work there mentioned

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proceeds from grace, is managed to the interest of righteousness, is carried on by the blood of Christ, and issues in forgiveness. Now the blood of Christ relates variously to the pardon of sin.

1 Pardon *is purchased and procured* by it. Our redemption is our forgiveness, as the cause contains the effect. No soul is pardoned but with respect to the blood of Christ, as the procuring cause of that pardon. Hence he is said to "have washed us in his blood," Rev. 1:5; "in himself to have purged our sins," Heb. 1:3; by "one offering to have taken away sin, and for ever to have perfected them that are sanctified," Heb. 10:14; to be the "ransom and propitiation" of our sins, 1 John, 2:2; to have made "an end of sin," Dan. 9:24; and to have "made reconciliation for the sins of his people," Heb. 2:17. God hath enclosed his rich stores of pardon and mercy in the blood of Jesus Christ.

2. Because in his blood *the promise of pardon is ratified and confirmed*, so that nothing is wanting to our complete forgiveness but our pleading the promise by faith in him. "All the promises of God are in him yea, in him amen," 2 Cor. 1:20; that is, faithfully and immutably established. And therefore the apostle having told us that this is the covenant of God, that he "would be merciful to our sins and iniquities," Heb. 8:12, he informs us that, in the undertaking of Christ, this covenant is become a testament, chap. 9:15, 16, 17; so ratified in his blood, that mercy and forgiveness of sin is irrevocably confirmed to us therein.

3. Because he hath in his own person, as the Head of the church, *received an acquittal for the whole body.* His personal discharge upon the accomplishment of his work, was a pledge of the discharge which was in due time to be given to his people. Those for whom, and in whose name, he suffered; for them, and in their name, he received the acquittal.

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4. Because, upon his death, God the Father hath committed to him *the whole management of the business of forgiveness*, "He gives repentance and forgiveness of sins." Acts, 5:31. It is Christ that forgives us. Col. 3:13. All forgiveness is now at his disposal, and he pardoneth whom he will; even all that are given to him of the Father, not casting out any that come to God by him. He is intrusted with all the stores of his Father's purpose and his own purchase, and thence tells us that "all things that the Father hath are his." John, 16:15.

In all these respects doth forgiveness relate to the blood of Christ. Mercy, pardon and grace could find no other way to issue forth from the heart of the Father but by the heart's blood of the Son, and thus they flow to the heart of the sinner.

Two things are principally to be considered in the relations of forgiveness to the blood of Christ. 1. The way of its procurement; 2. The way of its administration by him. The first is deep, mysterious, dreadful. It was by his blood, the blood of the cross, the travail of his soul; his undergoing wrath and curse. The other is gracious, merciful and tender; whence so many things are spoken of his mercifulness and faithfulness, to encourage us to expect forgiveness from him.

This also adds to the mysterious depths of forgiveness, and makes its discovery a great matter. The soul that looks after it in earnest must consider what it cost. How light do most men make of pardon! What an easy thing is it to be acquainted with it! And no very hard matter to obtain it! But to hold communion with God in the blood of his Son is a thing of another nature than is once dreamed of by many, who think they know well enough what it is to be pardoned. "God be merciful," is a common saying, and as common to desire he would be so "for Christ's sake." Poor creatures are cast into the mould of such expressions, who know neither God,

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nor mercy, nor Christ, nor any thing of the mystery of the Gospel. Others look on the outside of the cross:—but to see into the mystery of the love of the Father, working in the blood of the Mediator; to consider, by faith, the great transaction of Divine wisdom, justice and mercy therein, how few attain to it! To come to God, by Christ, for forgiveness, and therein to behold the law issuing all its threats and curses in his blood, and losing its sting, putting an end to its obligation to punishment; in the cross to see all sins gathered up in the hands of God's justice, and made to meet on the Mediator; and eternal love springing forth triumphantly from his blood, flourishing into pardon, grace, mercy, forgiveness—this the heart of a sinner can be enlarged to only by the Spirit of God.

IV. There is, in forgiveness, FREE DISCHARGE OR PARDON, according to the tenor of the Gospel; and this may be considered, 1, as it lies in the promise itself, or God's gracious declaration of pardon to sinners by the blood of Christ, which is variously proposed, according as he knew was needful, whether for their faith or consolation; and, 2, as the application of all this mercy to the soul of a sinner by the Holy Ghost; wherein we are "freely forgiven all our trespasses." Col. 2: 13.

Gospel-forgiveness, I say, respects all these things—these principles have all an influence in it. And that which makes this more evident, wherewith I shall close this consideration of its nature, is, that *faith*, in its application to God for forgiveness, distinctly applies itself, sometimes to *one of these*, *sometimes another*, *and sometimes takes into consideration all of them expressly*. Not that it ever rests on any one of them, exclusively of the others; but that eminently it finds some special encouragement at some season, and some peculiar attraction

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from some one of them, more than from the rest; and then that proves an inlet, a door of entrance, to the treasures laid up in the rest.

1. Sometimes faith fixes upon *the name and infinite goodness* of the nature of God, and draws out forgiveness from thence. So doth the Psalmist, "Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive." Psalm 86:5. He rolls himself, in the pursuit and expectation of pardon, on the infinite goodness of the nature of God. So Neh. 9:17, "Thou art a God of pardons," or ready to forgive; of an infinite, gracious, loving nature; not severe and wrathful. Thus we are encouraged "to stay on the name of God," Isa. 50:10, as in innumerable other places.

Thus faith often finds a peculiar sweetness and encouragement in the consideration of God's gracious nature. Sometimes this is the first thing it fixes on, and sometimes the last it rests in; and often it makes a stay here when driven from all other holds. Faith can say, However it be, yet God is gracious; and at least make that conclusion which we have from it, "God is gracious and merciful, who knoweth but he will return?" Joel, 2:13, 14. And when faith has well laid hold on this consideration it will not easily be driven from its expectation of relief and forgiveness, even from hence.

2. Sometimes the soul, by faith, addresses itself in a peculiar manner to *the sovereignty of God's will;* whereby he is gracious to whom he will be gracious, and merciful to whom he will be merciful; which, as was showed, is another considerable spring or principle of forgiveness. This way David's faith directed him in his great strait and perplexity, "If I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again; but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold here am I, let him do unto me as seemeth good unto him." 2 Sam. 15:25, 26. He had in consideration whether God had any delight in him; that is, whether God would graciously remit

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and pardon the great sin against which, at that time, he manifested his indignation. Here he lays himself down before the sovereign grace of God, and waits patiently the discovery of the free act of his will concerning him; and at this door, as it were, enters into the consideration of those other springs of pardon which faith inquires after and closes with. This, sometimes, is all the cloud that appears to a distressed soul, which, after a while, fills the heavens, by the addition of the other considerations mentioned, and yields plentifully refreshing showers. And to this condition is a sin-entangled soul oft-times reduced in looking for relief; it can discover nothing but this, that God is able, and can, if he graciously please, relieve and acquit him. All other support or springs of relief are shut up or hid from him. The springs, indeed, may be nigh, as that was to Hagar; but their eyes are withheld, that they cannot see them. Wherefore they cast themselves on God's sovereign pleasure, and say with Job, "Though he slay us, we will put our trust in him;" we will not let him go. In ourselves we are lost, that is unquestionable; how the Lord will deal with us we know not; evidences of God's grace in us, or of his love and favor to us, are all out of sight; to a present special interest in Christ we are strangers, and we lie every moment at the door of eternity. What course shall we take? what way shall we proceed? If we abide at a distance from God we shall assuredly perish: who ever hardened himself against him and prospered? Nor is there the least relief to be had but from him; for who can forgive sins but God? We will then bring our guilty souls into his presence, and attend the pleasure of his grace; what he speaks concerning us we will willingly submit to. And this sometimes proves an anchor to a tossed soul; which, if it do not give rest and peace, yet saves it from the rock of despair. Here it abides until light more and more breaks forth upon it.

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3. Faith commonly eyes forgiveness in a peculiar manner, in its relation to *the mediation and blood of Christ.* So the apostle directs, 1 John, 2:2, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins." If any one hath sinned, and is in depths and entanglements about it, what course shall he take? how shall he proceed to obtain deliverance? why, he must apply to God for pardon. But what shall he rely upon to encourage him in so doing? Saith the apostle, Consider, by faith, the atonement and propitiation made for sin by the blood of Christ; and that he is still pursuing the work of love to the suing out of pardon for us, and rest thy soul thereon. It is this, I say, on which faith most commonly rests.

4. Faith eyes *actual pardon.* So God proposes it as a motive to further believing: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins; return unto me, for I have redeemed thee." Isa. 44:22. Actual pardon of sin is proposed to faith, as an encouragement to a full returning to God in all things. 2 Sam. 23:5. And the same may be said of all the other particulars which we have insisted on. There is not one of them but will yield peculiar relief to a soul inquiring after forgiveness.

Let us now take along with us the end for which all these considerations have been insisted on. It is to manifest that a real discovery of gospel-forgiveness is a matter of greater consequence and importance than at first it perhaps appeared. Who is not in hope, in expectation of pardon? who thinks not that he knows well enough at least what it is, if he might but obtain it? But men may have general thoughts of impunity, and yet be far enough from any saving acquaintance with gospel mercy.

I shall only add, that this discovery of forgiveness

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IS MADE TO FAITH ALONE. The nature of it is such, that nothing else can discover it or receive it. No reasonings, no inquiries of the heart of man can reach it. That guess or glimpse which the heathens had of old, and false worshippers have at present, is not the forgiveness we insist upon, but a mere imagination of their own hearts.

This the apostle informs us, Rom. 1:17; the "righteousness of God is," in the Gospel, "revealed from faith to faith." Nothing but faith hath any thing to do with it. It is that "righteousness of God" whereof he speaks, that consists in the forgiveness of sins by the blood of Christ. And this is revealed from the faith of God in the promise, to the faith of the believer; to him that mixes the promise with faith. And again, more fully, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." 1 Cor. 2:9. We may come to the knowledge of things by the seeing of the eye, or the hearing of the ear, or the reasonings and meditations of the heart: but none of these will reach the matter in hand; by none of these ways can we come to an acquaintance with the things of the Gospel that are prepared for us in Christ. How then shall we obtain the knowledge of them? "God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." Now it is faith only that receives the revelations of the Spirit; nothing else hath to do with them. We remark then,

1. That this mystery is *too deep* to be fathomed by any thing but faith. Reason's line is too short to reach the depths of the Father's love, of the blood of the Son, and the promises of the Gospel built thereon, in which forgiveness dwells. Men cannot, by their reason merely, launch out into these deeps, or draw water from these wells of salvation.

Reason stands by amazed, and cries, How can these

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things be? It can but gather cockle-shells, like him of old, at the shore of this ocean; offer a few criticisms upon the outward letter; and so bring an evil report upon the land, as did the spies. All it can do is but to hinder faith from venturing into it; crying, Spare thyself, this attempt is vain, these things are impossible. This blinded reason faith puts aside when it engages the soul in this great work. And the soul, that it may come to a discovery of forgiveness, denies itself, and all its own reasonings, and gives up itself to the infinite fulness of goodness and truth. Though faith cannot go to the bottom of these depths, yet it enters them, and finds rest in them. Nothing but faith is suited to rest, to satiate and content itself in bottomless, unsearchable depths. This is what I looked for, saith faith, even for that which is infinite and unsearchable; for I know that there is abundantly more beyond me that I do not comprehend, than what I have attained to; I know that nothing else will do good to the soul. This puzzles and overwhelms reason; and what it cannot compass it will neglect or despise. It is either amazed and confounded, and dazzled, like weak eyes at too great a light; or, fortifying itself by inbred pride and obstinacy, it concludes that this preaching of the cross, of forgiveness from the love of God by the blood of Christ is folly, a thing not for a wise man to take notice of or to trouble himself about. So it appeared to the wise Greeks of old, 1 Cor. 1:23. Hence, when a soul is brought under the power of a real conviction of sin, so that he would anxiously be freed from its chains, it is then the hardest thing in the world to persuade such a soul of this forgiveness Any thing appears more rational to it; any self-righteousness in this world, any purgatory hereafter.

Many have forsaken forgiveness on this account; masses, penances, merits, have appeared more eligible; yea, men who have no other desire but to be forgiven.

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choose to rest in any thing rather than forgiveness. If men escape these rocks, and resolve that nothing but pardon will relieve them, yet it is impossible for them to receive it in the truth and power of it, if not enabled by faith. I speak not of men who take it up by hearsay, as a common report, but of those who know it is their only hope, and that they must perish everlastingly without it; and yet, when it is declared to them in the words of truth and soberness, they cannot receive it. What is the reason? Why, they have nothing to lead them into the mysterious depths of the eternal love of Christ, and the promises of the Gospel. How do we see poor diseased souls standing every day at the side of this pool, and yet not venturing themselves into it all their days.

2. It is *too great* for any thing but faith to discover. Forgiveness is a thing chosen out of God from all eternity, to exalt and magnify the glory of his grace; and it will be made clear to all the world, at the day of judgment, to have been a great thing. When the soul comes in any measure to be made sensible of it, it finds it so great, so excellent and astonishing, that it sinks under the thoughts of it. It hath a length, breadth, depth, and height that no line of the rational soul can measure. There is exceeding greatness in it, Eph. 1 : 19, even "to know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge." chap. 3 : 19. Here, I suppose, reason will confess itself at a stand; to know what passeth knowledge is none of its work.

3. But *this is faith's proper work;* even to know that which passeth knowledge. To know that, in its power and efficacy, which cannot be fully known in its nature; to have, by believing, all the ends of a full comprehension of that which cannot be fully comprehended. Hence, Heb. 11 : 1, it is said to be the evidence "of things not seen," though in themselves absent, yet faith gives them a present subsistence in the soul. So it knows things

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that pass knowledge; by mixing itself with them, it draws out and communicates their benefit to the soul.

CHAPTER VI.

SUPPORT FROM FORGIVENESS.

The discovery of forgiveness in God is A GREAT SUPPORT FOR A SIN-ENTANGLED SOUL, *although it hath no special persuasion of its own particular interest therein.* Somewhat is *supposed* in this assertion, and somewhat *affirmed.*

1. It is SUPPOSED, that one may have a gracious persuasion and assurance of faith concerning his own particular interest in forgiveness. Men may, many do, believe it for themselves; so as not only to have the benefit of it, but the comfort also. Generally all the saints mentioned in Scripture had this assurance, unless in the case of depths and desertions, as described in this psalm. David expresses his confidence of the love and favor of God to his own soul hundreds of times; Paul does the same for himself, "Christ loved ME, and gave himself for ME." Gal. 2 : 20. "There is laid up for ME a crown of righteousness, which God, the righteous Judge, shall give ME at that day." 2 Tim. 4 : 8. And that this boasting in the Lord and his grace was not peculiar to himself, he shows, Rom. 8 : 38, 39.

Nothing can be more vain than what is usually plead to remove this sheet-anchor of the saint's consolation; namely, that no man's particular name is in the promise; that it is not said to this or that man by name,

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that his sins are forgiven. To think it necessary that the names whereby we are known among ourselves should be written in the promise, in order that we may believe in particular every one for himself, is a vain conceit. True, the new name of every child of God is in the promise; and believing makes it very legible to him. Yea, we find by experience that there is no need of argumentation in this case. The soul, by a direct act of faith, believes its own forgiveness. But I will not dwell here, and proceed to remark, that,

1. *It is the duty* of every believer to seek assurance of personal forgiveness. The apostle exhorts us all to it, "Let us draw near, in full assurance of faith," Heb. 10 : 22; that is, of our acceptance with God, through forgiveness in the blood of Jesus. And this principle of our faith and confidence he would have us hold fast unto the end, chap. 3 : 14. It is no small evil in believers not to be pressing after perfection in believing and obedience; and some sinful indulgence to self, or the world, or sloth, is often the cause of it. Hence few come up to gospel-assurance. But yet most of our privileges and our comfort depend on this. To encourage to this duty, consider whence this assurance is produced, and what fruit it bears.

It is in general *the product of special communications of the Spirit.* It flourishes not without his sealing, witnessing, establishing, and shedding abroad the love of God in our hearts. See Rom. 5 : 2–5. And what believer ought not to long for, and press after the enjoyment of these things? Nay, to read of these things in the Gospel, not experiencing them in our own hearts, and yet to sit down quietly without continual pressing after them, is to despise the blood of Christ, the Spirit of grace, and the whole work of God's love. If there are no such things, the Gospel is not true; if there are, and we press not after them, we are despisers of the

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Gospel. Surely he hath not the Spirit, who would not have more of him, all of him that is promised by Christ. These things are the "hundred-fold" that Christ hath left us in the world, to counterpoise our sorrows and losses; and shall we be so foolish as to neglect our only abiding riches and treasures? In particular, it is the product of a vigorous, active faith; and that our faith should be such always, in every condition, I suppose it our duty to endeavor. Not only our comfort but our obedience also depends upon it. The more true faith, the more obedience. For all our obedience is the obedience of faith. The fruits of this assurance are the choicest actings of our souls towards God; as love, delight, rejoicing in the Lord, peace, joy, and readiness to do, or suffer.

In the ordinary dispensations of God towards us, it is also usually *by our own negligence* that we come short of this assurance. True, it depends in a peculiar manner on the sovereignty of God; he is as absolute in giving peace to believers, as in giving grace to sinners. He creates light, and causes darkness, as he pleases. But yet, considering what promises are made to us, what encouragements are given us, what love and tenderness there is in God to receive us, I cannot but conclude, that ordinarily our own neglect is the cause of our coming short of this assurance.

2. It is further *supposed* in our proposition, that there is, or may be, a saving persuasion or *discovery of forgiveness in God, where there is no assurance that our sins in particular are pardoned.* "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." Isaiah, 50: 10. Here is the fear of the Lord and obedience, with a blessed encouragement to rest in God, yet no assurance, nor light, but darkness, and that walked in, or

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continued in, for a long season. For he cannot walk in darkness, without any ray of light, as the words signify, who is persuaded of the love of God in the pardon of his sins. And yet the faith of such an one, and his obedience springing from it, have this gracious promise of acceptance with God. And innumerable testimonies to this purpose might be produced. I shall only confirm it, in one observation concerning the nature of faith, and one more about the proposal of the thing to be believed, or forgiveness.

Faith is called a "*cleaving unto the Lord.*" Deut. 4 : 4. It is also expressed by trusting in the Lord, rolling our burden or casting our care upon him, by committing ourselves or our ways to him. Now, all this goes no further than the soul's resignation of itself to God, to be dealt with by him according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, ratified in the blood of Christ. This a soul cannot do without a discovery of forgiveness in God; but this a soul may do without a special assurance of his own interest therein. This faith will lead men to conclude that it is their duty and their wisdom to give up the disposal of their souls to God, and to cleave to him as revealed in Christ, waiting the pleasure of his will. It enables them to make Christ their choice; and will carry men to heaven safely, though it may be, at some seasons, not very comfortably.

The revelation of forgiveness, made in the Gospel, evidences the same truth. The first proposal of it, or concerning it, is not to any man, that his sins are forgiven. No; but it is only that *there is redemption* and forgiveness of sins in Christ. So the apostle Acts, 13 : 38, 39. "Be it known to you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." All this may be be-

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lieved, without a man's assurance of his own personal interest in the things mentioned. Now, where they are believed with the faith the Gospel requires, that faith is saving, and the root of gospel, acceptable obedience. The ransom, the atonement by Christ, the fulness of the redemption in him, and so forgiveness in his blood for believers, from the good-will, grace, and love of the Father, is the first gospel-discovery in which a sinner, in a saving manner, rests. Particular assurance arises, or may arise, afterwards; and this also is supposed in the assertion.

The point AFFIRMED is, that a discovery of forgiveness in God, without any particular assurance of personal interest therein, is *a great support to a sin-entangled soul*. And let no man despise the day of this small thing, small in the eyes of some, and those good men also, as if it did not deserve the name of faith.

This discovery of forgiveness is the soul's persuasion, on gospel-grounds, that however it be with him, and whatever be his condition, God in his own nature is infinitely gracious, and that he hath determined, in a sovereign act of his will, from eternity, *to be gracious to sinners;* and that he hath made way for the administration of forgiveness by the blood of his Son, according as he hath abundantly declared in the promises of the Gospel. However it be with me, yet thus it is with God; there is forgiveness with him. This is the first thing that a soul in its depths rises to. And it is a support for it; enabling it to perform all present duties, until consolation come from above.

We may observe how far this relief extends, and to what it enables the soul. As,

1. The soul is enabled thereby to *resign itself to the disposal of sovereign grace*, in self-abhorrence and a renunciation of all other ways of relief, "He putteth his

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mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope. Lam. 3:29. What God will, is his language. Here he lies at his disposal, humble, broken, but abiding his pleasure. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Job, 13:15. "However he deals with me; whatever be the event, I will abide, cleaving unto him. I will not think of any other way of extricating myself from my distress. I will neither fly, like Jonah, nor hide, like Adam, nor take any other course for deliverance." Saith the soul, God is a God that hideth himself from me. Isaiah, 45:15. "I walk in darkness, and have no light," chap. 1:10. "My flesh faileth, and my heart faileth," Psalm 73:26; so that I am overwhelmed with trouble: "Mine iniquities have taken such hold on me that I cannot look up." Psalm 40:12. "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me." Isa. 49:14. Every day am I in dread and terror, and am ready to faint, and no relief can I obtain. What then shall I do? Shall I curse God, and die? Shall I take the course of the world, and, judging it will be no better, be wholly regardless of my latter end? No, I know, whatever my lot and portion be, that there is forgiveness with God. This and that poor man trusted in him, they cried unto him, and were delivered. David, in his greatest distress, "encouraged his heart in the Lord his God." 2 Sam. 15:25, 26. It is good for me to cast myself into his arms; it may be he will frown; it may be he is wroth still; but to him I will go; as it seems good to him to deal with me, so let it be. And unspeakable are the advantages which a soul obtains by this self-resignation, which the faith treated of will infallibly produce.

2. It extends itself to *a resolution of waiting on God.* This the church comes to: "It is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait, for the salvation of the Lord." Lam. 3:26. I will not give over my expec-

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tation, I will not make haste, nor limit God; but I will lie at his feet until his own appointed time of mercy shall come. Expectation and quietness make up waiting. These the soul attains to, with this support; it looks upwards, as a servant that looks to the hands of his master, still fixed on God, to see what he will do, to hear what he will speak concerning him; missing no season, no opportunity, wherein any discovery of the will of God may be made to him. And this he does in quietness, without repining or murmuring, turning all his complaints against himself and his own vileness, that hath cut him short from a participation of the fulness of love and grace in God. That this effect also attends this faith, will fully appear in the close of the psalm.

3. It supports our waiting in the use of all means for the attainment of a sense of forgiveness, and so hath its effects *in the whole course of our obedience:* "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." To fear the Lord is an expression comprehensive of his whole worship, and all our duty. To this I am encouraged, saith the Psalmist, in my depths, because there is forgiveness with thee. I will abide in all duties, in all the ways of thy worship, wherein thou mayest be found. And however it be for a while, the latter end of that soul, who thus abideth with God, will be peace.

Let us then, next, see by what MEANS the discovery of forgiveness yields this support.

1. It begets *confidence in God;* and consequently some love to him. The soul apprehends God as one infinitely to be desired, and delighted in. It cannot but consider him as good and gracious, however doubtful as to its own state. "God is good to Israel, to such as are of a clean heart; as for me, my feet were almost

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gone, my steps had well nigh slipped." Psalm 73 : 1, 2. However my state is, yet I know that God is good—good to Israel; and therewith will I support myself. When once the soul has reached this ground, that it considers God in Christ as one to be delighted in and loved, great and blessed effects will ensue. 1. Self-abhorrence and condemnation, with resignation of all to God, and permanency therein, certainly attend it. 2. Still something in God will be brought to mind, to relieve it under faintings; some new springs of hope will be every day opened. 3. And the soul will be insensibly wrought upon to delight itself in God. Though, in his own particular case, he meets with frownings, chidings, and repulses, yet this still relieves him, that God is as has been declared; so that he says, However it be, yet God is good; and it is good for me to wait upon him. Without this discovery, the soul is not drawn to God; and whatever it does with respect to him, it is because it dares do no otherwise, being overawed with his terror and greatness. Such obedience God may have from devils.

2. It *removes sundry overwhelming difficulties* that lie in the soul's way, before it close with this discovery of forgiveness.

It takes away all the hinderances that have been mentioned, from the greatness, holiness, and severity of God, the strictness of the law, and the natural actings of conscience, rising up against all hopes of forgiveness. All these are by this faith removed. Where this faith is, it discovers the true nature of gospel-forgiveness. It reveals it as flowing from the gracious heart of the Father, through the blood of the Son. This propitiation in the blood of the Son removes all these difficulties, even antecedently to our special sense of an interest therein. It shows how God may be exalted, and the law fulfilled, and yet forgiveness be extended to sinners. All those dreadful

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apprehensions of God, which were wont to arise in the first thoughts of coming to him, are now removed.

In particular, it removes *the overwhelming consideration of the unspeakable greatness of sin as exceeding the mercy of God.* This presses the soul to death when it is possessed with it. Were not their sins so great, such as no heart can imagine or tongue declare, it might possibly be well with them, say distressed sinners. They are not so troubled that they are sinners, as that they are great sinners: not so much that they are guilty of these and those sins, as that they are *great* sins, attended with fearful aggravations. Now, though this discovery frees not men from the entanglement of their sins, as theirs, yet it does from the whole entanglement of their sins, as great and many. That great sins can be pardoned, this discovery makes certain: whether his own sins shall be pardoned, is now the only inquiry. Whatever any faith can do, this faith will do: unless it be the making of particular application of the things believed unto itself. The soul then can no longer justly be troubled about the greatness of sin; the infiniteness of forgiveness that he sees in God will relieve him against it.

3. It gives *some life and encouragement in duty.* And that, first, in duty as duty; eyeing God by faith in such a fulness of grace, the soul cannot but be encouraged to meet him in every way of duty; every way leading to him, as leading to him, must be well liked and approved; and, secondly, in all duties: and herein lies no small advantage. God is often found in duties, but he has not revealed in what he will be found by any one soul in particular. This faith encourages the soul to all. Now, what support may be hence obtained, is easily apprehended; support, not from them, or by them, but in them, as the means of intercourse between God and the soul.

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From these effects of this discovery of forgiveness in God THREE THINGS will ensue, which are sufficient to maintain the spiritual life of the soul.

1. *A resolution to abide with God, and to commit all to him.* This the word, as was observed, teaches us: "There is forgiveness with thee," and therefore thou shalt be feared. Because this I found, this I am persuaded of, therefore will I abide with him in the way of his fear and worship. To this our Savior calls, John, 15 : 4. "Abide in me; except you do so ye can bear no fruit."

Many discouragements may rise up in the soul: fears, especially, will assault it, that it shall not hold out, that it shall be rejected at last, that all is naught and hypocritical with it, that it shall not be forgiven, that God indeed regards it not, and therefore it may well enough give over its hopes, which seems often as the giving up of the ghost. Again, oppositions arise from corruptions and temptations to sin, contrary to the life of faith: and these often proceed to a high degree of prevalency, so that the guilt contracted may seem to cast the soul quite out of all expectation of mercy: I shall one day perish by these means, saith the soul, if I am not already lost.

But where faith has made this discovery of forgiveness, the soul will abide with God against all these discouragements and oppositions; it will not leave him, it will not give over waiting for him. So David says, Psalm 73 : 2, "But as for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped;" and ver. 13, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain;" but yet, after all his conflicts, he comes to this at last, ver. 26, "Though my flesh and my heart faileth," yet, ver. 28, "it is good for me to draw near unto God;" I will yet abide with God, I will not let go his fear, nor my profession: although I walk weakly, lamely, unevenly, yet I will still

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follow after him. So when many, upon a strong temptation, went back from Christ, and walked no more with him, and "Jesus said to his disciples, Will ye also go away?" Peter replied in the name of the rest, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." John, 6 : 66–68. It is thus and thus with me, saith the soul; I am tossed and afflicted, and not comforted: little life, little strength, real guilt, many sins, and much distress. What then saith God by his word, "Wilt thou go away also?" No, saith the soul, there is "forgiveness with thee, thou hast the words of eternal life," and therefore I will abide with thee.

This abiding with God also argues the rejection of any other choice. Whilst the soul is in this condition, having not attained evidences of its own special interest in forgiveness, many temptations will assail it. Both self-righteousness and sin will be very importunate in this matter; the former tenders itself as exceedingly useful, to give the soul some assistance and support in its condition. Sometimes it presents itself in the aspect of a duty; but its end is to get somewhat of the faith and trust of the soul to be fixed upon it. But when the soul has indeed a discovery of forgiveness, it will give no ear to these solicitations. No, saith the soul, I see such a beauty, such an excellency, such a desirableness and suitableness to my wants and condition, in the forgiveness which is with God, that I am resolved to abide in the gospel-desire and expectation of it all the days of my life; here my choice is fixed, and I will not alter. And this resolution gives glory to the grace of God. When the soul, without an evidence of an interest in it, yet prefers it above that which, with many reasonings and pretences, offers a present relief to it, hereby is God glorified, and Christ exalted, and the spiritual life of the soul secured.

2 This discovery of forgiveness in God, with the

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effects of it before mentioned, will produce *a resolution of waiting on God* for peace and consolation, in his own time and way: "He that believeth shall not make haste," Isaiah, 28 : 16,—not make haste, to what? not even to the vivid enjoyment of the thing believed. Haste argues precipitation and impatience; this the soul that has this discovery is freed from. God, speaking of the accomplishment of his promises, says, "I the Lord will hasten it,"—but he will do it "in its time." All oppositions and impediments considered, it shall be hastened, but in its time, its due time, its appointed time. And this the soul is to wait for; and so it will.

As when Jacob had seen the beauty of Rachel, and loved her, he was contented to wait seven years for the enjoyment of her to be his wife, and thought no time long, no toil too hard, that he might obtain her; so the soul having discovered the beauty and excellency of forgiveness, as it is with God, as it is in his gracious heart, in his eternal purpose, in the blood of Christ, in the promise of the Gospel, is resolved to wait quietly and patiently for the time wherein God will clear up to it, its own personal interest therein. Even one experimental embrace of it, though at the hour of death, well deserves the waiting and obedience of the whole course of a man's life.

And this the Psalmist manifests to have been the effect produced in his heart and spirit; for, upon this discovery of forgiveness in God, he resolves both to wait upon Him himself, and encourages others so to do.

3. This *prepares the soul for receiving* consolation and deliverance out of its pressures, by an evidence of a special interest in forgiveness.

It makes men watch for this manifestation; it makes the soul like the merchant who hath great riches, all his wealth in a far country, which he wishes to bring home. If they come, he is well provided for; if they miscarry,

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he is lost and undone. This makes him hearken after tidings that they are safe though on a foreign shore; and as Solomon says, "good news," in this case, "from a far country, is as cold water to a thirsty soul," (Prov. 25 : 25,) full of refreshment. Though he cannot yet look upon them as his own absolutely, because he has them not in possession, he is glad they are safe. So it is with the soul; those riches which it so values, are, as to its apprehensions, in a far country. He is glad to hear news that they are safe; to hear forgiveness preached, and the promises insisted on, though he cannot as yet look upon them as his own.

The merchant rests not here, but he hearkens with much solicitude after the things that should bring home his riches, especially if they have in them his "all." He considers the wind and weather, all the occasions, and inconveniences, and danger of the way; and blame him not, his "all" is at stake. The soul in like manner hearkens after all the means whereby this forgiveness may be brought home to it; is afraid of sin and of temptation, glad to find a fresh gale of the Spirit of grace, hoping that it may bring in his return from the land of promise. This prepares the heart for a spiritual sense of it, when it is revealed.

It also prepares the soul, by bringing it to a due estimate of the grace and mercy desired. The merchantman in the Gospel was not prepared to enjoy the pearl himself, until it was discovered to him to be of great price; then he knew how to purchase it, procure it, and keep it. The soul having, by this acting of faith upon the discovery of forgiveness, come to find that the pearl hid in the field is indeed precious, is both stirred up to seek after possession of it, and to give it its due. Such a soul saith, "How excellent, how precious, is this forgiveness with God! Blessed, yea, ever blessed are they who are made partakers of it! What

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a life of joy, rest, peace and consolation do they lead! Had I but the evidence of an interest in it, and the spiritual consolation that ensues, how would I despise the world and all the temptations of Satan, and rejoice in the Lord in every condition!" And this apprehension of grace also exceedingly fits the soul for receiving a blessed sense of it, that God may have glory thereby.

It also gives the soul *a right understanding* of forgiveness, its nature, its causes, and effects. At first, the soul goes no further but to look after impunity, or freedom of punishment. "What shall I do to be saved" from hell? is the utmost it aims at; who shall deliver me? how shall I escape? And it would be contented to escape any way, by the law or the Gospel, if it may but escape. But upon this discovery of forgiveness a man plainly sees its nature, and that it is to be desired for its own sake. Indeed, when a soul is in trouble for sin, it knows not well what it would have. It has an uneasiness that it would be freed from; a dread of some evil condition that it would avoid. But now the soul can tell what it desires, what it aims at, as well as what it would be freed from. It would have an interest in eternal love, have the gracious kindness of the heart of God turned towards itself; and a manifestation of a special interest in the precious blood of the Son of God, whereby atonement is made for him. These things he comes for; in this way alone he would be saved, and no other. He sees such a glory of wisdom, love and grace, in forgiveness, such an exaltation of the love of Christ, in all his offices, especially in his death, sacrifice, and blood-shedding, whereby he procured or made reconciliation for us, that he exceedingly longs after the participation of them.

All these things, in their several degrees, will this discovery of forgiveness in God, without special evidence of a personal interest therein, produce. And these will assuredly maintain the spiritual life of the soul, and

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keep it up to such an obedience as shall be accepted of God in Christ. Darkness, sorrow, storms, they in whom it is may meet with; but their eternal condition is secured in the covenant of God; their souls are bound in the bundle of life.

From what has been said, we may draw some INFERENCES concerning the true notion of believing. And,

1. The effects ascribed to this faith of forgiveness in God, make it evident that many who pretend to believe that there is forgiveness with God, do indeed believe no such thing. I only ask what effects this faith has produced in them, and whether they have been enabled to perform the duties before mentioned? I fear, with many, the fruits of their pretended faith are quite otherwise. They love sin the more for it, and God never the better; supposing that a few barren words will issue the controversy about their sins, they come insensibly to have slight thoughts of sin, and of God also. This persuasion is not of Him that calls us. Poor souls! your faith is the devil's greatest engine for your ruin; the highest contempt of God and Christ, and forgiveness also, that you can be guilty of; a means to let you down quietly into hell: the Pharisees trusted in Moses, and will condemn you. As none is saved but by faith, so you, if it were not for your faith, as you call it, might possibly be saved. If a man's gold prove counterfeit, his jewels painted glass, his silver lead or dross, he will not only be found poor when he comes to be tried, and want the benefit of riches, but will also have a fearful aggravation of his poverty, by his disappointment and surprisal. If a man's faith, which should be more precious than gold, be found corrupt, if his light be darkness; how vile is that faith, how great is that darkness! Such, it is evident, will the faith of too many be found.

2. The object before us is the raising of a sin-entan-

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gled soul out of its depths; and this discovery of forgiveness must give him his first relief. Commonly, when souls are in distress, what they look after is *consolation*. What is it then which they intend thereby? that they may have assurance that their sins are forgiven, and so be freed from their present perplexities. What is the issue? Some of them continue complaining all their days, and never come to rest or peace; so far do they fall short of consolation and joy. And some are utterly discouraged from attempting any progress in the ways of God. What is the reason? Is it not that they would fain be finishing their building, when they have not laid the foundation? They have not yet made thorough work in believing forgiveness with God, and they would immediately have assurance in themselves. Now, God delights not in such a frame of spirit. For,

This haste for assurance is *selfish*. The great design of faith is to "give glory to God." Rom. 4 : 20. The end of God's forgiveness is the praise of his "glorious grace." Eph. 1 : 6. But let a soul in this frame have peace in itself, it is very little solicitous about giving glory to God. He cries, like Rachel, "Give me children, or I die;" give me peace, or I perish. That God may be honored, and the forgiveness he seeks be rendered glorious, is cared for but in the second place, if at all. This selfish earnestness, at once to be thrusting our hand in the side of Christ, is what he will pardon in many, but accepts in none.

It is *impatient*. Men act thus, because they do not like standing afar off, for any season, with the publican. They love not to submit their souls to lie at the foot of God, to give him the glory of his goodness, mercy, wisdom, and love, in the disposal of them and their concerns. This waiting comprises the universal subjection of the soul to God, with a resolved judgment, that it is meet and right that we, and all we desire and aim at,

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should be at his sovereign disposal. This gives glory to God; a duty which the impatience of these poor souls will not allow them to perform.

It is *weak:* it is weakness, in any condition, that makes men restless and weary. The state of adherence is as safe a condition as the state of assurance; only it hath more combats and wrestling attending it. It is not, then, fear of the event, but weakness and weariness of the combat, that makes men anxiously solicitous about an immediate deliverance.

Let, then, the sin-entangled soul remember always this order of the Gospel that we have under consideration. *First*, exercise faith on forgiveness in God; and, when the soul is fixed therein, it will have a ground and foundation on which it may stand securely in applying it to itself. Drive this principle, in the first place, to a stable issue, upon gospel-evidences; answer the objections that lie against it, and then you may proceed. In believing, the soul makes a conquest upon Satan's territories. Do, then, as they do who are entering on an enemy's country, secure the passage, fortify the strongholds as you go on, that you be not cut off in your progress. Be not as a ship at sea, which passes on, and is no more possessed of the water it has gone through than of that to which it is not yet arrived. But so it is with a soul that rests not on these foundation principles; he presses forwards, and the ground crumbles away under his feet, and so he wilders away all his days in uncertainties. Would men but establish this principle in their souls, and secure it against assaults, they might proceed, though not with so much speed as some do, yet with more safety. Some pretend at once to come into full assurance. I wish it may prove more than a mere presumption. It is to no purpose for him to strive to fly who cannot yet walk; to labor to come to assurance in himself, who never well believed forgiveness in God.

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CHAPTER VII.

EVIDENCES OF FORGIVENESS.

That we may be enabled to settle our persuasion of forgiveness in God, I proceed to adduce unquestionable evidences of this gospel truth, on which the soul may rest.

That which may be known of God is of two kinds: first, *his natural attributes*, his omnipotence, eternity, holiness, &c. These are revealed in his works, and may be discovered by the light of nature. Rom. 1: 19, 20.

Secondly; *the free acts of his will* and power, or his free eternal purposes, with the temporal dispensations that flow from them, which include his forgiveness, all which can be known *only by special revelation*. For

There is in the heart of man *no inbred notion* of the acts of God's will. Forgiveness is not revealed by the light of nature; flesh and blood declare it not. By that means "no man hath seen God at any time," John, 1: 18; that is, as a God of mercy and pardon, as the Son reveals him. Adam had acquaintance, according to the limited capacity of a creature, with the properties and excellences of the nature of God. It was implanted in his heart, as indispensably necessary to that natural worship which, by the law of his creation, he was to perform; but when he had sinned, it is evident that he had not the least apprehension that there was forgiveness with God: such a thought would have laid a foundation of some further treaty with God about his condition. He had no other design but "of flying and hiding himself," Gen. 3: 10; so declaring that he was utterly ignorant of any such thing as pardoning mercy. Such are all the first or natural conceptions of sinners: namely, that it

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is "the judgment of God," Rom. 1:32, that sin is to be punished with death.

The consideration of *his works* will not help a man to the knowledge that there is forgiveness with God. The apostle tells us, Rom. 1:20, what it is of God that his works reveal—even his eternal power and Godhead, or the essential properties of his nature; but no more: not any of the purposes of his grace; not pardon and forgiveness. Besides, God made all things in such a state of rectitude and uprightness, Eccl. 7:29, that it was impossible they should have any respect to sin, or to the pardon of it, of which they stood in no need. There being no such thing in the world as sin, nor any such thing supposed to be, when all things were made of nothing, how could any thing declare or reveal the forgiveness of it?

No *works of God's providence* can make known this forgiveness. God has indeed borne testimony to himself and his goodness in all ages, from the foundation of the world, in the works of his providence. So, Acts, 14:15–17, "We preach unto you, that you should turn from these vanities unto the living God, who made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who, in times past, suffered all nations to walk in their own way. Nevertheless, he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness:"—"He left not himself without witness;" that is, by the works of his providence there recounted, he thus far bore testimony to himself, that he is, and is good, and doeth good, and ruleth the world; so that they were inexcusable who, not noticing these works of his, nor the fruits of his goodness which they lived upon, turned away after "vain things," as the apostle there calls the idols of the Gentiles. So again, Acts, 17:23–27. By arguments taken from his works, both of creation and

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providence, the apostle proves the being and properties of God; yea, he lets them know that God designed, by his works, so far to reveal himself to them, as the true and living God, the Maker and Governor of all things, that they ought to have inquired more diligently after him, and not to look on him as "the unknown God." But of the discovery of pardon and forgiveness in God, by these means, he speaks not; yea, he plainly shows that they were not thus manifested. The great call to saving repentance is by the revelation of forgiveness. But by these works of his providence God brought not the Gentiles to saving repentance. No, he "suffered them to walk still in their own ways," Acts, 14:16, "and winked at the times of their ignorance;" but "now," that is, by the word of the Gospel, "commandeth them to repent." chap. 17:30.

When man fell, there had been one signal act of God's providence about sin, but it was so far from revealing forgiveness in God, that it rather severely intimated the contrary. This was God's dealing with *sinning angels*. The angels were the first sinners, and God dealt first with them about sin. And what was his dealing with them the Holy Ghost tells us, "He spared not the sinning angels." 2 Pet. 2:4. He spared them not: it is the same word as is used where he speaks of laying all our iniquities on Christ, he undergoing the punishment due to them, "He spared him not," Rom. 8:32; that is, he laid on him the full punishment that, by the curse and sanction of the law, was due to sin. So he dealt with the angels that sinned; he spared them not, but inflicted on them the punishment due to sin, shutting them up under chains of darkness for the judgment of the great day. Hitherto, then, God kept all thoughts of forgiveness in his own eternal mind: there was not so much as the least dawning of it upon the world. And this was at first no small reason against any thoughts of

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forgiveness. The world is made, sin enters by the most glorious part of the creation, whose recovery by pardon might seem to be most desirable; but not the least appearance of it is discovered. Thus it was hid in God from the foundation of the world. Eph. 3:9.

God gave to man *a law of obedience* immediately upon his creation. This law it was supposed that man might transgress. The very nature of a law prescribed to free agents, attended with threatenings and promises of reward, requires that supposition. Now there was not annexed to this law, or revealed with it, the least intimation of pardon to be obtained, if transgression should ensue. "In the day thou eatest, thou shalt surely die:" dying, thou shalt die; or bring upon thyself assuredly the guilt of death, temporal and eternal. There God leaves the sinner. Of forgiveness, or pardoning mercy, there is not the least intimation. To this very day that law, which was then the whole rule of life and acceptance with God, knows no such thing. Dying, thou shalt die, O sinner, is its precise and final voice.

From these preliminary considerations, in connection with what was before said, some things preparatory to the ensuing discourse may be *inferred*.

1. It is *a great and rare thing* to have forgiveness in God discovered to a sinful soul. Conscience and law, with the inbred notions in the heart of man about God's holiness and vindictive justice, lie against it. It is a matter of which there is no common notion in the mind of man; a thing which no consideration of the works of God, either of creation or providence, will reveal; and which the great instance of God's dealing with sinning angels renders deep, admirable and mysterious. Men who have common and slight thoughts of God, of themselves, of sin, of obedience, of the judgment to come, of eternity, that feed upon the ashes of rumors, reports, hearsays, traditions, without looking into the reality of

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things, may, and do take this to be an ordinary and acknowledged truth, easy to be entertained, which no man disbelieves. But convinced sinners who make a trial of these things, as running into eternity, have other thoughts of them. And as to that which it is pretended every one believes, we have great cause to cry out, "Lord, who hath believed our report? to whom hath this arm of the Lord been revealed?"

2. The discovery of forgiveness in God, being a matter of such great difficulty, is a thing precious and excellent, as being *the foundation* of all communion with God here, and of all undeceiving expectation of our enjoyment of him hereafter. It is a pure gospel truth, that has neither shadow, footstep nor intimation elsewhere; the whole creation has not the least obscure impression of it left thereon: so that,

3. It is undoubtedly greatly incumbent on us to *inquire diligently*, as the prophets did of old, into this salvation; to consider what sure evidences faith has that will not, cannot fail us. To be superficial in this matter, to take it up at random, indicates an unsound and rotten heart. He that is not serious in his inquiry into the revelation of this matter, is serious in nothing in which God or his soul is concerned. The Holy Ghost knows what is our frame of heart, and how slow we are to receive this blessed truth in a gracious, saving manner. Therefore doth he confirm it to us with such weighty considerations, as, Heb. 6: 17, 18, "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation." It is of forgiveness of sin that the apostle treats, as has been already shown. Men may think that possibly God will not fulfil his promises of mercy: No, saith the apostle, it is spoken by God, and it is impossible he should lie. Yea, but upon

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the manifold provocations of sinners, he may change his mind and thoughts therein: No, saith the apostle, there is a peculiar immutability in his counsel concerning the execution of this thing; there can be no change in it. But how does it appear that this indeed is the counsel of his will? Why, saith he, he hath declared it by his word, and that given in a way of promise; which, as in its own nature it is suited to raise an expectation in those to whom it is given, so it requires exact faithfulness in the performance of it, which God, on his part, will assuredly fulfil. But neither is this all; that no place might be left for any cavilling in this matter, "he interposeth himself by an oath." Thus we have this truth deduced from the veracity of God's nature, one of his essential excellences, established in the immutable purposes of his will, brought forth by a word of promise, and confirmed by God's interposing himself against all occasions of exception (so to put an end to all strife about it) by an oath, swearing by himself that so it should be. I have mentioned this to show what weight the Holy Ghost lays upon this great truth, and thence how deeply it concerns us to inquire diligently into it, and after the grounds and evidences of it; which, among others, are these that follow:

I. The first *evidence of forgiveness* we have IN THE FIRST PROMISE. The earliest manifestation of forgiveness in God was made to our first parents after their shameful sin and fall; in which the ensuing observations are to be considered.

1. The first sin in the world was, on many accounts, the *greatest* sin in the world. It was the sin, as it were, of human nature, wherein there was a conspiracy of all individuals. Rom. 5:12. It left not God one subject, as to moral obedience, on earth, nor the ground that there should be such an one to eternity. When the an-

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gels sinned, the whole race or kind did not fall. "Thousand thousands of them, and ten thousand times ten thousand continued in their obedience." Dan. 7:10. But here all and every individual of mankind (he only excepted who was not then in Adam) were involved. Besides, it disturbed the government of God over the whole creation. God had made all things in order and beauty, pronouncing concerning his whole work, that it was exceedingly beautiful and good. Gen. 1:31. Much of this beauty lay in the subordination of one thing to another, and of all to himself, by the interposition of man, through whose praises and obedience the rest of the creation, being made subject to him, was to return their tribute of honor and glory to God. But all this order was destroyed by this sin, and the very creation made subject to vanity. Rom. 8:20.

2. Our first parent who sinned, subscribed in his heart and conscience to the righteous sentence of the law. He knew what he had deserved, and looked for nothing but the immediate execution of the sentence of death upon him. Hence he meditates not a defence, expects no pardon, stays not for a trial, but flees and hides, and attempts an escape. "I was afraid," saith he, "and hid myself," Gen. 3:10; than which never were there words of greater horror in the world, nor shall be unto the day of judgment. Poor man! he was full of expectation of the vengeance due for a broken covenant.

3. God had newly declared, in the sinning angels, what his justice required, and how he could deal with sinning man, without the least impeachment of his government, holiness, or goodness. See 2 Pet. 2:4.

4. There was nothing, without God himself, that should move him in the least, so much as to suspend the execution of his wrath for one moment; he had not done so with the angels. All things now lay under

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wrath, curse, confusion, and disorder; nothing was left good, lovely, or desirable in his sight. As in the first creation, that which was brought forth from nothing, was "without form and void," so was it now again. There was an emptiness and vanity brought by sin upon the whole creation: nothing remained that might be a motive to a merciful restoration, but all is again devolved on his sovereignty. All things being in this state, in which all things conspired to the glory of God's justice in the punishing of sin; the whole creation, and especially the sinner himself, trembling in expectation of a dreadful doom, what now cometh forth from him? The blessed word, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." Gen. 3 : 15. It is full well known, that the whole mystery of forgiveness is wrapt up in this one word of promise. And the great way of its coming forth from God, by the blood of the Messiah, whose heel was to be bruised, is also intimated. This was the first discovery ever made of forgiveness in God. By a word of pure revelation it was made, and so faith must take it up and receive it. Now, this revelation of forgiveness with God, in this one promise, was the foundation of all the worship yielded to him by sinners for many ages; and this will continue to the end of the world, as a notable evidence of the truth before us, a firm foundation for faith to rest and build upon. Let a sinner seriously consider the state of things as they were, and then view God coming forth with a word of pardon and forgiveness, merely from his own love, and those counsels of peace between the Father and the Son; and he cannot but conclude, under his greatest difficulties, that yet there is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared. Let now the law and conscience, let sin and Satan stand forth and except against this evidence: it is enough to put them all to silence.

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II. God revealed this sacred truth by the INSTITUTION OF SACRIFICES. Sacrifices by blood, do all of them respect atonement, expiation, and consequently forgiveness. It is true, indeed, they could not themselves take away sin, nor make them perfect who came to God by them, Heb. 10 : 1, but yet they undeniably evince the taking away of sin, or the forgiveness of it, by what they did denote and typify. I shall therefore look back a little into their rise and intention.

1. The *origin* of sacrifices is not in the Scripture expressly mentioned: only the practice of the saints is recorded; but it is certain, from infallible scripture evidences, that they were of God's immediate appointment. God never allowed that the will or wisdom of man should be the spring and rule of his worship. That solemn word wherewith he prefaces the rule of his worship, "Thou shalt not make to thyself," which is the life of the command, (that which follows being an explanation and confirmation of the law,) cuts off all such pretences, and is as a flaming sword turning every way to prevent men's arbitrary approaches to God's institutions. God will not part with his glory of being the only lawgiver, as to the whole concern of his worship, or any part of it, to any of the sons of men.

2. Neither is *the time* of their institution mentioned. Some of the papists urge (for there is a generation of philosophical disputers amongst them, by whom their tottering cause is supported), that there would have been sacrifices in paradise if man had not sinned. But as, in all their dogmas, the first inquiry must be, what do they get by this or that, their whole religion being shaped to their carnal interest; so we may in particular do it, upon this strange assertion, which is perfectly contradictory to the very nature and end of most sacrifices, namely, that they should be offered where there is no sin. Why, they hope to establish hence a general

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rule, that there can be no true worship of God in any state or condition without sacrifice: What then? Why, then the continual sacrifice of the *mass* is necessary in the church, and without it there is no true worship of God; and thence their advantage and profit: the mass being that inexhaustible spring of revenue which feeds their pride and lust throughout the world. But there is in the church of Christ an altar still, and a sacrifice still, which they have rejected for the abominable figment of their mass, namely, *Christ himself*, as the apostle informs us, Heb. 13 : 10. But as the sacrifices of beasts could not have been before the entrance of sin, so it may be shown that they were instituted from the foundation of the world, that is, presently after the entrance of sin. Christ is called the "Lamb of God," John, 1 : 29, which he was, in reference to the sacrifices of old, as 1 Pet. 1 : 18, 19: whence he is represented as a "Lamb slain," Rev. 5 : 6, or giving out the efficacy of all sacrifices to his church.

Now, he is said to be "a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," Rev. 13 : 8, which could not be, unless some sacrifice prefiguring his being slain had been then offered; for it denotes not only the efficacy of his mediation, but the way. Besides, the apostle tells us that "without shedding of blood there was no remission," Heb. 9 : 22; that is, God, to demonstrate that all forgiveness related to the blood of Christ, from the foundation of the world, gave out no word of pardon, but by blood. Now, I have shown that he revealed pardon in the first promise, and therefore there ensued the shedding of blood and sacrifices, and that testament or covenant was dedicated with blood, ver. 18. Some think that the beasts of whose skins God made garments for Adam, were offered in sacrifices. Nor is their conjecture vain: yea, it seems fitting that their nakedness, which became their shame upon their sin, (whence the

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pollution and shame of sin is frequently so termed,) should be covered with the skins of their sacrifices; for in the true sacrifice there is somewhat answerable thereto: the righteousness of Him whose sacrifice takes away the guilt of our sin, is called our clothing, that hides our pollution and shame.

3. After the giving of the law, *the most noble and solemn part of the worship of God* consisted in sacrifices. And this kind of worship continued, with the approbation of God, from the entrance of sin until the death of the Messiah, the true sacrifice, which put an end to all that was typical.

These things being premised, we may consider what was the mind and aim of God in the institution of this worship. One instance will answer this inquiry, Lev. 16 : 20, 22–32. "He shall bring the live goat, and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness, and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited."

Let us see to what end is all this solemnity, and what is declared thereby. Wherefore should God appoint poor sinful men to come together, to take a goat or a lamb, and to confess over his head all their sins and transgressions, and to devote him to destruction under that confession? Had men invented this themselves, it had been a matter of no moment. But it was an institution of God, which he bound his church to observe, on penalty of his highest displeasure. Certainly this was a solemn declaration, that there is forgiveness with him. Would that God, who is infinitely good, and so will not, who is infinitely true, holy and faithful, and so cannot deceive, call out men whom he loved to a

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solemn representation of a thing, wherein lay their chief, their eternal concern, and suffer them to feed upon ashes? Let men take heed that they mock not God; for, of a truth, God mocketh not men, until he be finally rejected by them. For four thousand years, then, did God declare by sacrifices, that there is forgiveness with him, and lead his people by them to make a public representation of it in the face of the world

III. God's prescribing REPENTANCE to sinners reveals that there is forgiveness with him. After the angels had sinned God never once called them to repentance. He would not deceive them, but let them know what they were to look for at his hands; he had no forgiveness for them, and therefore would require no repentance of them. Their eternal anguish for sin committed has nothing of repentance in it. The appointment, then, of repentance, is a revelation of forgiveness. God would not call upon a sinful creature to humble itself, and bewail its sin, if there were no way of recovery or relief; and the only way of recovery from the guilt of sin is pardon; so Job, 33 : 27, 28. "He looketh on men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light." In the foregoing verses he declares the various ways that God used to bring men to repentance. He did it by dreams, ver. 15, 16; by afflictions, ver. 19; by the preaching of the word, ver. 23. What then is God's design in all these various ways of teaching? It is to cause man to say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right. It is to bring him to repentance. What now, if God's design is gained and man comes to repentance? Why, then there is forgiveness for him, as is declared, ver. 28. To improve this evidence, I shall confirm, by some considerations, these two things: First,

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that the prescription of repentance doth indeed evince that there is forgiveness with God. Secondly, that every one in whom there is wrought repentance towards God, may certainly conclude that there is forgiveness with God for him.

1. *No repentance is acceptable with God but what rests on the faith of forgiveness.* We have a cloud of witnesses to this truth in the Scripture. Many there have been, many are recorded, who have been convinced of sin, perplexed about it, sorry for it, who have made open confession and acknowledgment of it, who, under the present sense of it, have cried out even to God for deliverance, and yet have come short of mercy, pardon, and acceptance with God. The cases of Cain, Pharaoh, Saul, Ahab, Judas, and others, might be insisted on. What was wanting, that made all that they did abominable? Consider one instance for all: it is said of Judas, that he repented, Matt. 27 : 3; "he repented himself;" but in what did this repentance consist? 1. He was convinced of his sin in general; "I have sinned," ver. 4. 2. He was sensible of the particular sin of which he stood charged in conscience before God: "I have betrayed innocent blood;" I am guilty of blood, innocent blood, and that in the vilest manner, by treachery. So that he comes, 3. To a full and open confession of his sin. 4. He makes restitution of what he had gained by his sin, "he brought again the thirty pieces of silver," ver. 3, all testifying a hearty sorrow. Methinks now, Judas's repentance looks like the young man's obedience, who cried out, "All these things have I done: is there any thing yet lacking?" Yea, one thing was wanting to that young man, he had no true faith nor love to God, which vitiated and spoiled all the rest of his performances. One thing is also wanting to this repent ance of Judas, he had no faith of forgiveness in God: that he could not believe; and therefore after all this

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sorrow, instead of coming to him, he bids him the utmost defiance, and hangs himself.

What it is in particular, in this faith of forgiveness, which is indispensably necessary to render repentance acceptable, I do not here attempt to define. It is not an assurance of the acceptance of our persons in general It is not, that the particular sin wherewith, it may be, the soul is perplexed, is forgiven. A general, if it be a gospel discovery, that there is forgiveness in God, will suffice. It is expressed, Hos. 14 : 3, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy;" and Joel, 2 : 14, "Who knows but he will return and repent?" "I have this ground," saith the soul; "God is in himself gracious and merciful; the fatherless, the destitute and helpless, that come to him by Christ, find mercy in him. None in heaven and earth can show, but that he may return to me also." Now, let a man's convictions be ever so great, sharp, wounding; his sorrow ever so abundant, overflowing, abiding; his confession ever so full, free, or open; if this one thing be wanting, all is nothing but what tends to death.

2. To prescribe to sinners repentance as a duty, without a foundation of pardon and forgiveness in God, is *inconsistent with the wisdom*, holiness, goodness, faithfulness, and all the other excellencies and perfections of his nature.

The apostle represents it as the great foundation of all consolation, that God cannot lie or deceive. Heb. 6 : 18. And again, he engages the faithfulness and veracity of God to the same purpose. Tit. 1 : 2. "God, who cannot lie, hath promised it." The very proposal of repentance to a sinner conveys the idea that there is forgiveness with God. Repenting is for sinners. "I came not," saith our Savior, "to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." It is for them, and them only. No such call was addressed to Adam in Eden; none is to the angels in heaven, or to the damned in hell. What then is

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the import of their call? O sinners, come and dea
God by repentance! Does it not openly speak fo
ness in God? and, if it were otherwise, could men possibly be more frustrated or deceived? would not the institution of repentance be a lie? Such a delusion may proceed from Satan, but not from Him who is the fountain of goodness, holiness and truth. His call to repentance is a full demonstration of his readiness to forgive. Acts, 17: 30–32. It is true, many in this matter deceive themselves. They raise themselves to an expectation of immunity, not on gospel grounds; and their disappointment will be a great part of their punishment. But God deceives none; whoever comes to him on his proposal of repentance shall find forgiveness. It is said of some, indeed, that he "will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh." Prov. 1: 26. He will aggravate their misery, by giving them to see to what their pride and folly have brought them. But who are they? Only such as refuse his call to repentance, with the promises of acceptance annexed.

There is then no cause why those who are under a call to repentance should question whether there be forgiveness in God. Come, saith the Lord, leave your sinful ways, turn unto me, humble yourselves with broken and contrite hearts. Alas! say convinced sinners, we are poor, dark, and ignorant; or, we are old in sin, or great sinners, or backsliders, or have fallen often into the same sins: can we expect there should be forgiveness for us? Why, you are under God's invitation to repentance; and to disbelieve forgiveness, is to call the truth, holiness, and faithfulness of God in question. If you will not believe forgiveness, pretend what you please, it is in truth because you hate repentance. You do but deceive your own souls when you pretend that you come not to repentance because you cannot believe forgiveness: for, in the very institution of this duty, God

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engages all his properties to make it good, that he has pardon and mercy for sinners.

Much less cause is there to doubt of forgiveness where sincere repentance is exercised in any degree No soul comes to repentance but upon God's call. God calls none but those for whom he has mercy upon their coming.

God *expressly declares* in the Scripture, that the forgiveness which is with him is the foundation of his prescribing repentance unto man. One instance may suffice, Isa. 55 : 7. "Let the wicked forsake his way," (in the Hebrew, a perverse wicked one;) "and the man of iniquity his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy; and to our God, for," (in the Hebrew,) "he will multiply to pardon." You see to whom he speaks—to men perversely wicked, and such as make a trade of sinning. To what does he call them? Plainly to repentance, to the duty we have insisted on. But what is the ground of such an invitation to such profligate sinners? Why, the abundant forgiveness and pardon that is with him, superabounding to what the worst of them can stand in need of; as Rom. 5 : 20.

This is another way whereby God has revealed that there is forgiveness with him, and an infallible foundation for faith to build upon, in its approaches to him. Nor can the certainty of this evidence be called into question, but on such grounds as are derogatory to the glory and honor of God. And this connection of repentance and forgiveness, is that principle from which God convinces a stubborn unbelieving people that all his ways and dealings with sinners are just and equal. Ezek. 18 : 25. And should there be any failure in it, they could not be so. Every soul, then, that is under a call to repentance, whether out of his natural condition, or from any backsliding into folly after conversion, has a sufficient foundation to rest on, as to the pardon he

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inquires after. God is ready to deal with him on terms of mercy. If out of love to sin, or the power of unbelief, he refuse to close with God on these terms, his condemnation is just.

Do any object that it is needless here to multiply arguments, since the truth that there is forgiveness with God is GRANTED, as one of the fundamental principles of religion; and as none call it in question, it requires no confirmation? We answer:

1. That it is generally granted, is no argument that it is effectually believed. What will it avail any of us that there is forgiveness of sin with God, if our own sins be not forgiven? No more than that such or such a king is rich, whilst we are poor and starving. My aim is not to prove it as an opinion, or a mere speculative truth; but so to present it in the principles of its being and revelation, that it may be believed; on which all our blessedness depends.

2. It needs not the less confirmation because it is a plain fundamental truth; but rather the more, and that because of the worth and weight of it. "This is a faithful saying," saith the apostle, "worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." So I say of this, which, for the substance of it, is the same with that; it is worthy of all acceptation, that there is forgiveness with God; and therefore it ought to be fully confirmed; especially whilst we make use of no other demonstrations of it but those which God has furnished; and this he would not have done, but that he knew them to be needful for us. As for the plainness of this truth, it is well if it be so to us. This I know, nothing but the Spirit of God can make it so. Men may please themselves, and others sometimes, with curious speculations, and make them seem to be things of great import; which, when they are well ex

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amined, are not true; or if true, are yet of little consequence. It is these fundamental truths that have the mysteries and grace of God inwrapped in them; which, whoso can unfold aright, will show himself "a workman that needs not be ashamed." These still waters are deep; and the farther we dive into them, the greater discovery shall we make of their depths.

3. We dwell on these evidences, because multitudes are concerned in them. All who do believe, and all who do not believe, are so; those who do believe, that they may be established; and those who do not believe, that they may be encouraged so to do. Among both these classes, some evidences may be more profitable and useful, to one, and some to another. It may be that amongst all, the whole will be gathered up, that no fragments be lost. They are all, I hope, instruments provided by the Holy Ghost for this end; and we endeavor to commit them into his hand, to be made effectual as he will. One may reach one soul, another another, according to his pleasure. One may be of use to establishment, another to consolation, a third to encouragement, according as the necessities of souls require. However, God, who has provided them, knows them all to be needful.

4. They are so also on account of the various conditions in which the same believers may be. One may give help to the same soul at one season, another at another; one may secure the soul against a temptation, another stir it up to thankfulness and obedience.

These things have I spoken, that you may not think we dwell too long on this consideration. And I pray God that your consolation and establishment may abound in the reading of these meditations, as I hope they have not been altogether without fruit in their preparation

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CHAPTER VIII.

EVIDENCES OF FORGIVENESS—*continued.*

We have considered the evidence that there is forgiveness in God, from the first promise; the institution of sacrifices; and God's requiring repentance.

IV. Let us then, as a fourth evidence of this truth, consider those, both under the Old Testament and the New, concerning whom we have the greatest assurance that GOD FORGAVE THEIR SINS, and they are now in the enjoyment of him. This argument the apostle insists upon, and presses from numerous instances, Heb. 11. How many does he there reckon up, who of old obtained a good report, and had this testimony, that they pleased God. "All these inherited the promises through believing;" ver. 13; that is, obtained the forgiveness of sin. For as by nature they were children of wrath, and under the curse, without forgiveness, every one of them would have continued in the state wherein Adam was when he heard the voice of God, and was afraid. Wherefore it being evident that some persons, in all generations, have enjoyed the friendship, love, and favor of God in this world, and at their departure out of it have entered into glory, it makes it evident that there is forgiveness of sin with him, without which these things could not be.

Let us, like the apostle, mention some examples. Look to *Abraham;* he was the friend of God, and walked with God; God made a solemn covenant with him, and takes it for his memorial throughout all generations, that he is the God of Abraham: and he is doubtless now at rest with God. Our Savior calls the place or condition into which blessed souls are gathered, "Abraham's bosom."

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The condition was the same with *Isaac and Jacob;* they also are in heaven, being alive unto and with God. Our Savior proves it from the tenor of the covenant, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Matt. 22 : 32. They are yet alive, alive unto God, and with him, by virtue of the covenant; or, after their death God would not be said to be their God. This is the force of our Savior's argument, that after their death God was still their God. Then death had not reached their whole persons; they were still alive with God in heaven; and their bodies, by virtue of the same covenant, were to be recovered out of the dust.

The same is the state with *David.* He was a man after God's own heart. And, though he died, and his body saw corruption, yet he is not lost; he is with God in heaven. Hence he ended his days triumphantly, in a full apprehension of eternal rest, beyond what could in this world be attained, and that by virtue of the covenant: for these are the last words of David, "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant," ascertaining to him sure and eternal mercies. 2 Sam. 23 : 5

Peter also is in heaven. Christ prayed for him, that his faith should not fail; and in his death he glorified God. John, 21 : 19.

So is *Paul:* he knew that when he was dissolved, he should be with Christ. Here, then, we are encompassed with *a cloud of witnesses.* For,

1. It is most certain that they were all *sinners;* they were all so by nature; for in this there is no difference among the children of men. And by practice also they were sinners: they confessed themselves to be such, and some of the sins of all of them stand upon record; yea, some of them were great sinners. Some before

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their conversion, as Abraham, who was an idolater, Joshua, 24 : 2, 3; and Paul, who was a persecutor and a blasphemer. Some after their conversion; some in sins of the flesh, as David; and some in sins of profession, as Peter. Nothing, then, is more evident, than that no one of them came to rest with God but by forgiveness. Had they never been guilty of any sin but what is left upon record concerning them in holy writ, yet they could be saved no other way; for he that transgresseth the law in any one point, is guilty of the breach of the whole. James, 2 : 10.

What shall we now say? Do we think that God has forgiveness only for this or that individual? No man questions but that all these were pardoned. Was it by virtue of any special personal privilege, that was peculiar to them? Whence should any such privilege arise, seeing, by nature, they were no better than others, nor would have been so personally, had not they been delivered from sin, and prepared for obedience, by grace and pardon? Wherefore, they all obtained forgiveness, by virtue of the covenant, from the forgiveness which is with God. And this is equally ready for others, who come to God the same way that they did; that is, by faith and repentance.

2. Many of those, concerning whom we have the assurance mentioned, were not only sinners, but *great sinners*, as was said, which must be also insisted on to obviate another objection. For some may say, that though they were sinners, yet they were not such sinners as we are; and though they obtained forgiveness, yet this is no argument that we shall, who are guilty of sins unlike theirs, and attended with peculiar aggravations. To which I say, that I delight not in aggravating, no, nor yet in repeating, the sins and faults of the saints of God of old. Not only the grace of God, but the sins of men, have by some been turned into

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lasciviousness, or been made a cloak for their lusts But yet, for the ends for which they are recorded by the Holy Ghost, we may mention them. That they may warn us of our duty; that we take heed lest we also fall; that they may yield us a relief under our surprisals, are they written. So then, where the mention of them tends to the advancement of sovereign grace and mercy, which is the case in hand, we may insist on them. I think, then, that without mention of particulars, I may safely say that there is no sin, no degree of sin, no aggravating circumstance of sin, no kind of continuance in sin, (one sin only excepted,) but that there are those in heaven who have been guilty of them.

It may be, some will say, that they have considered the sins of Lot, David, Peter, Paul, and the thief himself on the cross, and yet they find not their own condition exemplified, so as to conclude that they shall have the same forgiveness with them.

Answer 1. I am not showing that this or that man shall be pardoned, but only demonstrating that *there is forgiveness* with God, and that for all sorts of sins and sinners, which these instances do assuredly confirm And, moreover, they manifest that if other men are not pardoned, it is merely because they make not that application for forgiveness which these did.

2. Yet, by the way, to meet this objection, consider also what the apostle says in particular concerning *the several classes* of sinners that obtained mercy. "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified." 1 Cor. 6: 9, 10, 11. Hell can scarce, in more words, yield us a

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sadder catalogue. Yet "some" of all these classes were justified and pardoned.

3. Suppose this enumeration of sins does not reach the condition of the soul, because of *some special aggravation* of its sin, not expressed, let such a one add that of our Savior, "I say unto you, *all manner* of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost." Matt. 12:31. They are not, they shall not be all actually remitted and pardoned to all men; but they are all pardonable to those that seek to obtain pardon for them according to the Gospel. There is with God forgiveness for them all. Now, certainly any particular sin, that only excepted, comes within the compass of "all manner of sin and blasphemy;" and so, consequently, some who have been guilty of it are in heaven.

We take it for a good token and evidence of a virtuous healing water, when, without fraud or pretence, we see the crutches of cured cripples and impotent persons hung about as a memorial of its efficacy. And it is a great demonstration of the skill of a physician, when many come to a sick person and tell him, We had the same disease with you, it had the same symptoms, the same effects, and by his skill and care we are cured. Oh! saith the sick man, bring him to me, I will venture my life in his hand. Now, all the saints of heaven stand about a sin-sick soul, for in this matter we are encompassed with a cloud of witnesses. Heb. 12:1. And what do they witness? What say they to a poor guilty sinner? As thou art, so were we; so guilty, so perplexed, so obnoxious to wrath, so fearing destruction from God! And what course did you take to obtain the blessed condition wherein you now are? They all reply, We went to God, through Christ, for forgiveness, and found plenty of grace, mercy and pardon in him for us all! The rich man in the parable thought it would be a great means

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of conversion, if one should rise from the dead and preach; but here we see that all the saints departed, and now in glory, do jointly preach this fundamental truth, that there is forgiveness with God.

Poor souls are apt to think that all those whom they read or hear of as gone to heaven, went thither because they were so good and so holy. It is true, many of them were eminently so in their generation. All of them were so according to their degrees and measures; for "without holiness no man can see God." And it is our duty to labor to be like them in holiness, if ever we intend to be so in happiness and glory. But yet not one of them—not any one that is now in heaven, Jesus Christ alone excepted,—ever came thither any other way but by forgiveness of sin: and that will also bring us thither, though we come short of many of them in holiness and grace.

This evidence of forgiveness I the rather urge, because I find the apostle Paul doing it eminently in his own person: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, *for a pattern* to them that should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." 1 Tim. 1:12, 13, 15, 16. A great sinner, saith he, the chief of sinners I was, which he manifests by some notable instances of his sin. I was, saith he, a blasphemer, the highest sin against God; a persecutor, the highest sin against the saints; injurious, the highest wickedness towards mankind: but "I obtained mercy," I am pardoned, and that with most blessed effects. After all this, he was so accounted faithful as to be put into the ministry, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ towards him was exceeding abundant. And what was the reason that he was thus dealt with? Why, it was that he might be

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a pattern, an evidence, an argument, that there was grace, mercy, forgiveness, to be had for all sorts of sinners that would believe to life everlasting.

To conclude, then, this evidence:—Every one who is now in heaven has his pardon sealed in the blood of Christ. All these pardons are set before us in the Gospel; they are enrolled in its promises for the encouragement of those who stand in need of forgiveness. Fear not, then, the guilt of sin, but the love of it, and the power of it. If we love sin better than forgiveness, we shall assuredly fail of forgiveness; but if we had rather be pardoned in God's way than perish, our condition is secure.

V. The same is evident from THE PATIENCE OF GOD towards the world; in reference to which we may observe,

1. That upon the first entrance of sin, God might immediately have *executed the threatened curse*, and brought eternal death upon them that sinned. Justice required that it should be so, and there was nothing in the whole creation to interpose so much as for a reprieve or respite of vengeance. And had God then sent sinning man, with the apostate angels that induced him to sin, immediately into eternal destruction, he would have been glorified in his righteousness by the angels that sinned not; or he could have created a new race of innocent creatures, to have worshipped and glorified him for his righteous judgment; even as all the elect at the last day shall do for the destruction of ungodly men.

2. God hath not taken this course. He hath continued the race of mankind for a long season on the earth; he hath watched over them with his providence, and exercised exceeding *patience*, forbearance and long-suffering towards them. This the apostle Paul at large discourses on, Acts, 14:15–17; 17:24–30; as also Rom. 2:4; and it is open and manifest in the event. The whole

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world is every day filled with tokens of the power and patience of God. Every nation, every city, every family is filled with them.

3. There is a common *abuse of this patience* of God visible in the world in all generations. So it was of old. God saw it to be so, and complained of it. Gen. 6:5, 6. All the sin and wickedness that has been in the world, which no heart can conceive, no tongue can express, has been an abuse of this patience of God. This, with most men, is the consequence of God's patience and forbearance. They count this a season to fulfil all the abominations that their evil hearts can suggest to them, or Satan draw them into. This the state of things in the world proclaims, and every one's experience confirms.

4. Let us therefore consider what is the true and proper *design* of this patience of God towards the world, enduring it in sin and wickedness for so long a season, and suffering one generation to be multiplied after another. Shall we think that God has no other design in all this patience towards mankind in all generations, but merely to suffer them, all and every one, without exception, to sin against him, dishonor him, provoke him, that so he may at length everlastingly destroy them all? It is confessed that this is the consequence, the event with most men, through their perverse wickedness, with their love of sin and pleasure. But is this the design of God? his only design? has he no other purpose but merely to bear with them awhile in their folly, and then to avenge himself upon them? Is this his intention, not only towards those who are obstinate in their darkness, ignorance and rebellion against him, whose damnation is just and sleepeth not, but also towards those whom he stirs up by his grace to seek deliverance from the state of sin and death? God forbid; yea, such an apprehension would be contrary to all those notions of the infinite wisdom and goodness

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of God which are engrafted upon our hearts by nature, and which all his works declare. Whatever, therefore, it be, this cannot be the design of God in his patience towards the world. He must long since have cut off the whole race of mankind if he had had no other thoughts and purposes towards them.

Let us, therefore, see what is the end or design of this patience, and what it teaches us. It can have no end but that just considered, unless there be forgiveness of sins with God. Unless God be ready to forgive the sins of them that come to him according to his appointment, his patience is merely subservient to a design of wrath, and a resolution to destroy. But this would reflect unspeakable dishonor upon the holy God. Let a man deal thus, and it manifests an evil and perverse habit of mind. Let him bear with those who are in his power, in their faults, with no other design but that he may take advantage to bring a greater punishment and revenge upon them; and what more vile affection, what more wretched corruption of heart and mind can he manifest? And shall we think that this is the whole design of the patience of God? God forbid!

It may be objected to this argument, that it is said that God, "willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endures with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction," Rom. 9 : 22; and thus it seems that the end of God's endurance and long-suffering, to some at least, is only their fitting for destruction.

I answer: God's "enduring with much long-suffering," merely implies his withholding, for a season, the destruction which he might justly inflict: his patience denotes acting in a way of goodness and kindness for some special end. The next verse *declares the great end* of God's patience, and answers this objection, that "he might make known the riches of his glory in the ves-

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sels of mercy which he had prepared for glory," verse 23. This is the great end of God's patience, which while he pursues towards the vessels of mercy, he endures others with much long-suffering and forbearance. This, then, is fully evident, that there could be no sufficient reason assigned for the patience of God towards sinners, but that there is forgiveness prepared for them that come to him by Christ, to which Scripture clearly testifies. 2 Pet. 3 : 9. The question is, what is the reason why God forbears the execution of his judgment upon ungodly men? Some would have it that God is slack; that is, regardless of the sins of men, and takes no notice of them. No, saith the apostle, God has another design in his patience and long-suffering. What is this? It is, to manifest that he is not willing we should perish. This it is which we have proved. For our freedom from destruction is by repentance, which necessarily infers the forgiveness of sin. So Paul tells us, that in the Gospel is declared what is the end of God's patience and forbearance; namely, "the remission of sins." Rom. 3 : 25.

Let us then bear in mind this evidence, in the applying ourselves to God for pardon. It is certain that God might have taken us from our birth, and have cast us into utter darkness. And, in the course of our lives, we have been guilty of such provocations as God might justly have visited, to glorify his justice and severity in our ruin. But yet we have lived thus long by the patience and forbearance of God. And to what end has he thus spared us? Is it not that he might, by his patience, give us leave and space to get an interest in that forgiveness which he thus testifies to be in himself? Let us then be encouraged by it, to use it to the end and purpose for which it is exercised towards us.

You that are yet in doubt of your condition, consider that the patience of God was extended to you

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this day, this very day, that you might use it for the obtaining of the remission of your sins. Lose not this day, nor one day more, as you love your souls; for woful will be their condition who shall perish for despising or abusing the patience of God.

VI. THE FAITH AND EXPERIENCE OF THE SAINTS in this world concur in this testimony, and we know that their record in this matter is true. Let us then ask them what they believe, what they have found, what they have experience of, as to the forgiveness of sin?

This God himself directs and leads us to, by appealing to our own experience; whence he shows us that we may take relief and support in our distresses. Isaiah, 40 : 28. "Hast thou not heard? Hast thou not known?" Hast not thou thyself, who now criest out that thou art lost and undone, because God hath forsaken thee, found and known by experience the contrary, from his former dealings with thee? And if our own experience may confirm us against the workings of our unbelief, so may that of others. Thus Eliphaz directs Job, "Call now, if there be any that will answer thee, and to which of the saints wilt thou look?" chap. 5 : 1. It is not a supplication to them for help that is intended, but an inquiry after their experience in the case in hand, wherein he wrongfully thought they could not justify Job. In the Hebrew "to which of the saints, on the right hand or the left, wilt thou have regard in this matter?" Some would foolishly hence seek to confirm the invocation of departed saints: when indeed, if they were intended, it is rather forbidden and discountenanced than directed to. But the saints here are, "the saints that are in the earth," Psalm 16 : 3, into whose experience Job is directed to inquire. David makes it a great encouragement to waiting upon God, as a God hearing prayer, that others had done so, and found success, Psalm 34 : 6.

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"This poor man cried unto the Lord, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." If he did so, and had the blessed issue, why should not we do so also? The experiences of one are often proposed for the confirmation and establishment of others: "Come," says David, "and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." Psalm 66 : 16. He contents not himself to remind them of the word, promises, and providence of God, which he does most frequently; but he gives them the encouragement and support of his own experience.

So Paul tells us, "that he was comforted of God in all his tribulations, that he might be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith he himself was comforted of God," 2 Cor. 1 : 4; that is, that he might be able to communicate to them his own experience of God's dealing with him, and the satisfaction and assurance he found therein. So also he proposes the example of God's dealing with him in the pardon of his sins, as a great motive to others to believe. 1 Tim. 1 : 13–16. And this mutual communication of satisfying experiences in the things of God, or of our spiritual sense and evidence of the power, efficacy, reality of gospel-truths, being rightly improved, is of great benefit to all classes of believers. So the same great apostle acquaints us in his own example, "I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, to the end you may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me." Rom. 1 : 11, 12. He longed, not only to be instructing them in the pursuit of the work of the ministry committed to him, but to confer also with them about their mutual faith, and what experience of the peace of God in believing they had attained.

We have before called in the testimony of the saints in heaven, with whom those on earth make up one fami-

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ly, even that one family in heaven and earth, which is called after the name of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Eph. 3 : 14, 15 ; and they all agree in their testimony, as becomes the family and children of God. But these below we may deal personally with ; whereas we gather the witness of the other only from what is left upon record concerning them. And here several things are to be observed.

Men living in the profession of religion, *and not experiencing its power and efficacy in their hearts*, are, whatever they profess, very near to atheism. If they profess to know God, but in works deny him, "they are abominable, and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate." Tit. 1 : 16. Let such men lay aside tradition and custom, let them give up themselves to a free and rational consideration of things, and they will quickly find that all their profession is but miserable self-deceiving; and that indeed they believe not one word of the religion which they profess. Of what their religion affirms to be in themselves, they find no evidence in its real existence in their own hearts. And what evidence have they that their faith in whatever else it reveals is genuine? If they have no experience of what it affirms to be within them, what confidence can they have in their belief of the reality of what it reveals to be without them? John tells us, that "he who saith he loves God whom he hath not seen, and doth not love his brother whom he hath seen, is a liar." So he who believes not, who experiences not, the power of that which the religion he professes affirms to be in him, if he says that he believes other things of which he can have no experience, he deceives himself. For instance, he that professes the Gospel, avows that the death of Christ crucifies sin; that faith purifies the heart; that the Holy Ghost quickens the soul to duty; that God is gracious to all that come to him; that there is precious communion to be

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obtained with him by Christ; that there is great joy in believing. These things are plainly, openly, and frequently insisted on in the Gospel. But if men have lived long in the profession of these things, saying that they are so, but indeed find nothing of truth, reality, or power in them, have no experience of the effects of them in their own souls, what stable ground have they of confidence in their belief of any thing else in the Gospel, of which they cannot have experience? A man professes that the death of Christ will mortify sin and subdue corruption; why does he believe it? because it is so affirmed in the Gospel. But does he in his own experience find it to be so? Has it this effect on his soul, in his own heart? Not at all; he finds no such thing in him. How then does this man savingly believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God because it is affirmed in the Gospel, seeing he finds no real truth in what it affirms to be in himself? So our Savior argues, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things?" John, 3: 12. If you believe not the doctrine of regeneration, which you ought to experience as wrought in the hearts of men on earth; how do you believe those heavenly mysteries of the Gospel, which at first are to be received by a pure act of faith, without any present sense or experience.

Of all dangers, therefore, in profession, let professors take heed of this; namely, of a customary, traditional or doctrinal owning such truths as ought to have their effects and accomplishment in themselves, whilst they have no experience of their reality and efficacy. This is plainly to have a form of godliness, and to deny the power thereof: and of this sort of men do we see many turning atheists, scoffers, and often apostates; they find in themselves that their profession was a lie, and that, in truth, they had none of those things which they talked of. Finding these things, which they have pro-

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fessed to be in them, not to be in them, they think that what they have believed of the things that are without them, is also vain, and that they may be rejected altogether.

You will say, then, What shall a man do who cannot find experience in himself of what is affirmed in the word? He cannot find the death of Christ crucifying sin in him, and he cannot find the Holy Ghost sanctifying his nature, nor obtain joy in believing. What shall he then do? shall he not believe or profess those things to be so, because he cannot obtain a blessed experience of them? I answer, our Savior has given full direction in this case: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." John, 7: 17. Continue in the things revealed in the doctrine of the Gospel, and you shall have a satisfactory experience that they are true, and that they are of God: cease not to act faith on them, and you shall find their effects; for "then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." Hosea, 6: 3. Experience will ensue upon permanency in faith and obedience. Yea, the first act of sincere believing will be accompanied with such a taste, will give the soul so much experience as to produce a firm adherence to the things believed. This is the way to prove "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God," which is revealed to us." Romans, 12: 2.

Where there is an inward, spiritual experience of the power, reality, and efficacy of any supernatural truth, it gives great satisfaction, stability, and assurance to the soul. It removes from the soul the fear of being deceived, and gives it to have the testimony of God in itself. So the apostle tells us, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." 1 John, 5: 10. He had discoursed of the manifold

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testimony that is given in heaven by all the holy persons of the Trinity, and on earth by grace and ordinances, to the forgiveness of sin and eternal life to be obtained by Jesus Christ. And this record is true, firm and stable, an abiding foundation for souls to rest upon, that will never deceive them. But yet all this mercy of God is a thing that exists without us; it is what we have no experience of in ourselves: we rest upon it only because of the authority and faithfulness of Him that reveals it. Still it is a fact that he who actually believes has the testimony in himself; he has, by experience, a real evidence and assurance of the things testified to, namely, "that God hath given us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son," verse 11. Let us then consider in what this evidence consists, and whence this assurance arises.

1. There is a great *correspondence between the heart of a believer and the truth he believes.* As the word is in the Gospel, so is grace in the heart; yea, they are the same thing variously expressed, "Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine delivered unto you." Rom. 6 : 17. I know not how in few words to express what is emphatically here intimated by the Holy Ghost. The meaning is, that the doctrine of the Gospel begets the form, figure, image, or likeness of itself, in the hearts of them that believe; so that they are cast into the mould of it. As is the one, so is the other: as is regeneration, so is a regenerate heart; as is the doctrine of faith, so is a believer: and this gives great assurance of the things that are believed. As we have heard, so we have seen and found it; such a soul can produce the duplicate of the word, and so adjust all things thereby

2. The first original expression of divine truth is *not in the word*, no, not as given out from the infinite abyss of divine wisdom and veracity, but it is laid up and expressed *in the person of Christ.* He is "the first pattern

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of truth," which from him is expressed in the word, and from and by the word impressed on the hearts of believers; so that, as it has pleased God that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge should be in him, dwell in him, have their principal residence in him, Col. 2 : 3; so the whole word is but a revelation of the truth in Christ, or an expression of his image and likeness to the sons of men. Thus we are said to "learn the truth as it is in Jesus." Eph. 4 : 21. It is in Jesus originally, and from him is communicated to us by the word. We are thereby taught, and do learn it; for thereby, as the apostle proceeds, "we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and do put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness," verse 23, 24. First, the truth is in Jesus; then it is expressed in the word : this word, learned and believed, becomes grace in the heart, every way answering to the Lord Christ's image, from whom this transforming truth did thus proceed. Nay, this is carried by the apostle yet higher, namely, to God the Father himself, whose image Christ is, as believers are his, through the word : "We all with open face, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord," 2 Cor. 3 : 18; to which add, chap. 4 : 6, "God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The first pattern or example of all truth and holiness, is God himself, of whom Christ is the image, "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." Heb. 1 : 3. "The image of the invisible God." Col. 1 : 15. Hence we are said to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; because he being his image, the love, grace, and truth of the Father are represented and made conspicuous in him. We are said

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to behold it in his face, because of the open and illustrious manifestation of the glory of God in him. And how do we behold this glory? In a glass, "as in a glass," that is, in the Gospel, which hath the image and likeness of Christ, who is the image of God, reflected upon it and communicated to it. So have we traced truth and grace from the person of the Father, to the Son as Mediator, and thence transfused into the word. But doth it abide there? No, God by the word of the Gospel "shines into our hearts." 2 Cor. 4:6. He irradiates our minds with a saving light into it, and apprehension of it. And what thence ensues? The soul of a believer is changed into the same image, by the effectual working of the Holy Ghost, chap. 3:18, that is, the likeness of Christ implanted on the word, is impressed on the soul itself, whereby it is renewed into the image of God. This brings all into a perfect harmony. Where Gospel truth is effectually received and experienced in the soul, there is not only a consonancy between the soul and the word, but between the soul and Christ by the word, and the soul and God by Christ. And this gives assured establishment to the soul in the things it believes. Divine truth so conveyed to us, is firm, stable, and immovable. And we can say of it in a spiritual sense, "That which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life," we know to be true. Yea, a believer is a testimony to the certainty of truth. Words may be pretended; real effects have their testimony inseparably annexed to them.

3. Hence it appears that there must be *great assurance* of the truths which are thus received and believed. For hereby are "the senses exercised to discern good and evil." Heb. 5:14. Where there is a spiritual sense of truth, from an inward experience of

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what is so good, and thence an aversion to the contrary, and this obtained by an habitual frame of heart, there is strength, there is steadfastness and assurance. This is the teaching of the "unction from the Holy One," which will not, which cannot deceive. Hence many of old and of late, that could not argue, could yet die for the truth. He who came to another, and went about to prove by sophistical reasons that there was no such thing as motion, had only this return from him, who either was not able to answer his cavilling, or was unwilling to trouble himself about it; he arose, and walking up and down, gave him a real confutation of his sophistry. It is so in this case; when one has a real experience of the grace of God, of the pardon of sin, of the virtue and efficacy of the death of Christ, of justification by his blood, and peace with God by believing; let men or devils, or angels from heaven, oppose these things, if he cannot answer their sophisms, yet he can "rise up and walk;" he can, with all holy confidence and assurance, oppose his own satisfying experience to all their arguings and suggestions. A man will not be disputed out of what he sees and feels; and a believer will abide as firmly by his spiritual sense as any man can by his natural sense.

This is the meaning of that prayer of the apostle, Col. 2 : 2, "That your hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." Understanding in the mysteries of the Gospel they had; but he prays, that by a farther experience of it they might come to the "assurance of understanding." To be true, is the property of the doctrine itself; to be certain or assured, is the property of our minds. Now this experience so unites the mind and truth, that we say, such a truth is most certain; whereas certainty is indeed the

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property of our minds, or their knowledge, and not of the truth known It is certain to us, that is, we have an assured knowledge of it by the experience we have of it. This is the "assurance of understanding" here mentioned. And he further prays that we may come to the riches of this assurance; that is, to an abundant, plentiful assurance: and that, "to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God," owning it from a sense and experience of its excellency and worth.

This is in the nature of all gospel truths; they are fitted to be experienced by a believing soul. There is nothing in them so sublime and high, nothing so mysterious, nothing so seemingly low and outwardly contemptible, but that a gracious soul has experience of an excellency, reality, power, and efficacy in it all. For instance, look on that which concerns the order and worship of the Gospel. This seems to many to be a mere external thing, of which a soul can have no inward sense or relish. Many notions there are about it, and endless contentions, but what more? Why, let a gracious soul, in simplicity and sincerity, give up himself to walk with Christ according to his appointment, and he shall quickly find such a taste and relish in the fellowship of the Gospel, in the communion of saints, and of Christ amongst them, that he shall come up to such riches of assurance in the understanding and acknowledgment of the ways of the Lord, as others, by their arguing, can never attain. What is so high, glorious, and mysterious, as the doctrine of the ever blessed Trinity? Some wise men have thought meet to keep it veiled from ordinary christians; and some have delivered it in such terms that nothing can be understood by them. But take a believer who has tasted how gracious the Lord is, in the eternal love of the Father, the great undertaking of the Son in the work of mediation and redemption, with the almighty work of

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the Spirit, creating grace and comfort in the soul, and has had an experience of the love, holiness, and power of God in them all, and he will, with more firm confidence, adhere to this mysterious truth, being led into it, and confirmed in it, by some few plain testimonies of the word, than a thousand disputers shall do, who only have the notion of it in their minds. Let a real trial come, and this will appear; few will be found to sacrifice their lives on bare speculations. Experience will give assurance and stability.

We have thus established the testimony now to be improved. It is evident on these grounds, that there is *great certainty* in those truths of which believers have experience. Where they communicate their power to the heart, they give an unquestionable assurance of their truth; and when that is once realized in the soul, all disputes about it are put to silence.

These things being so, let us inquire into the faith and experience of the saints on earth, as to *what they know* of the truth proposed for confirmation; namely, that there is forgiveness with God. Let us go to some poor soul that now walks comfortably under the light of God's countenance, and say to him, Did we not know you some time since to be full of sadness and great anxiety of spirit; yea, sorrowful almost to death, and bitter in soul?

Answer. Yes, saith he, so it was indeed; my days were consumed with mourning, and my life with sorrow; and I walked heavily in fear and bitterness of spirit all the day long.

Why, what ailed you? what was the matter with you, seeing, as to outward things, you were at peace?

Answer. The law of God had laid hold of me, and slain me; I found myself thereby a woful sinner, yea, overwhelmed with the guilt of sin. Every moment I

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expected tribulation and wrath from the hand of God: "My sore ran in the night, and ceased not, and my soul refused comfort."

How is it, then, that you are thus delivered, that you are no more sad? Where have you found peace? have you been by any means delivered, or did your trouble wear off and depart of its own accord?

Answer. Alas! no, it did not wear off of itself; had I not met with an effectual remedy, I had sunk, and everlastingly perished.

What course did you take?

Answer. I went to Him, by Jesus Christ, against whom I have sinned, and have found him better to me than I could expect, or ever should have believed, had not he filled my heart by communications of his Spirit. Instead of wrath, which I feared, and that justly, because I had deserved it, he said to me in Christ, "Fury is not in me." For a long time I could not believe it; I thought it impossible that there should be mercy and pardon for me, or such a one as I. But he still supported me, sometimes by one means, sometimes by another; until, taking my soul near to himself, he caused me to see the folly of my unbelieving heart, and the vileness of the hard thoughts I had of him, and that indeed there is with him forgiveness and plenteous redemption. This has taken away my sorrows, and given me quietness, and assurance.

But are you sure now that this is so? may you not possibly be deceived?

Answer. I have not the least suspicion of any deception or mistake in this matter.

But how are you confirmed in this persuasion?

Answer. That sense of it which I have in my heart, that sweetness and rest which I experience, that influence it has on my soul, that obligation I find laid on me by it to all thankful obedience, that relief, support

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and consolation which it has afforded me in trials, in the mouth of the grave and entrance of eternity, all answering what is declared concerning these things in the word, leave no reason to doubt its reality. I could not indeed receive it, until God was pleased to speak it to me. But now, let Satan do his utmost, I shall never cease to bear this testimony, that there is mercy and forgiveness with God.

How many thousands may we find in the world, who have had such a seal of this truth in their hearts, that they can not only lay down their lives in the confirmation of it, if called thereto, but do cheerfully and triumphantly venture their eternal interests upon it. Yea, this is the source of all that peace, serenity of mind, and strong consolation, of which in this world they are made partakers.

Now, this is to me, on the principles before laid down, an evidence great and important. God has not manifested this truth unto the saints, thus copied it out of his word and exemplified it in their souls, to leave them under any possibility of being deceived.

CHAPTER IX.

EVIDENCES OF FORGIVENESS—*continued.*

To the evidences already adduced, we add,

VII. God's INSTITUTION OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP is another evidence that there is forgiveness with him. All the worship God has appointed to us, and all the honor which we thus render to his holy Majesty, rests on the same foundation, namely, a supposition of forgiveness;

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and is appointed to teach it, and assure us of it. Hence observe,

1 That the general end of all divine and religious worship, is *to raise to God a revenue of glory* out of the creation. Such is God's infinite self-sufficiency, that he stands in need of no such glory and honor. He was in himself no less infinitely and eternally glorious before the creation of any thing whatever, than he will be when he shall be encompassed with the praises of all the works of his hands. Such is his absolute perfection, that no honor given to him, no admiration of him, no ascription of glory and praise, can add any thing to him. Hence, saith the Psalmist, "My goodness extendeth not to thee." Psalm 16 : 2. It doth not so reach thee, as to add unto thee to profit thee, as it may do the saints on earth. As in Job, 22 : 2, 3, and 35 : 7, "Can a man be profitable unto God, as a man that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous, or is it gain unto him that thou makest thy ways perfect? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him, or what receiveth he at thine hand?" And the reason of all this the apostle gives us, "Of him, and through him, and to him are all things." Rom. 11 : 36. Being the sovereign cause and the absolute end of all things, every way perfect and self-sufficient, nothing can be added to him. Or as the same apostle speaks, "God that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, is not worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth unto all life, and breath, and all things. Acts, 17 : 24, 25.

2. Wherefore all the revenue of glory that God will receive by his worship depends merely on *his own voluntary choice and appointment.* All worship, I say, depends now on the sovereign will and pleasure of God. It is true, there is a natural worship due from rational

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creatures, by the law of their creation. This was indispensably and absolutely necessary at first. The very being of God, and order of things, required that it should be so. Supposing God to have made such creatures as we are, it could not be but that moral obedience was due to him: that he should be believed in, trusted and obeyed, as the first cause, the great end and sovereign Lord of all. But the entrance of sin, laying the sinner absolutely under the curse of God, utterly put an end to this order of things. Man was now to have perished immediately. But here, in the sovereign will of God, an interposition was made between sin and the sentence; and man was respited from destruction. All worship following this, even that which was before natural by the law of creation, is now resolved into an arbitrary act of God's will.

All worship is designed to give glory to God. For, as God has said that he will be sanctified in all that draw nigh to him, that is, in his worship, and that therein he will be glorified, Lev. 10 : 3, and that he that offereth him praise, that is, performeth any part of his worship and service, glorifieth him, Psalm 50 : 23; so the nature of the thing itself declares that it can have no other end.

3. Consider, that God has not prescribed any worship of himself to *the angels that sinned*. They are, indeed, under his power, and he useth them as he pleaseth, to serve the ends of his holy providence. Bounds he prescribes to them by his power, and keeps them in dread of the full execution of his wrath; but he calls them not, as he does us, to repentance and faith, to the exercise of love, fear, delight, and all those inward affections which are the proper worship of God. Such worship they entirely cast off from them in their first sin. Now, as God dealt with the angels, so also would he have dealt with mankind, had he left them all under the curse

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without remedy or hope of relief. As he eternally satisfies himself in the revenue of glory which arises to him in their punishment, so also he would have done with men had there been no forgiveness with him for them. He would not have required them to fear, love or obey him, or have appointed to them any way of worship whereby to express such affections towards him. Wherefore,

4. It is evident that God, *by prescribing worship* to sinners, fully declares that there is forgiveness with him for them.

A contrary course *would not become* his infinite self-sufficiency, goodness and bounty. This the wife of Manoah well pleads: "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a meat-offering and a burnt offering at our hands." Judges, 13 : 23. His acceptance of worship from us is an infallible demonstration that he will not execute against us the severity of the first curse. This is clearly shown in the first record of solemn instituted worship performed by sinners, "God had respect unto Abel and his offering." Gen. 4 : 4. Some think that God gave a visible pledge of his acceptance of Abel and his offering; it may be, it was by fire from heaven; for how else should Cain so instantly know that his brother and his offering were accepted, but that he and his were refused? However it were, it is evident that what testimony God gave of the acceptance of his offering, the same he gave concerning his person; and that in the first place he had respect unto Abel, and then to his offering. And therefore the apostle saith, that thereby he obtained "witness that he was righteous," Heb. 11 : 4, that is, the witness or testimony of God himself. Now, this was in the forgiveness of his sin, without which he could neither be righteous nor accepted, for he was a sinner. This God declared by acceptance of his worship. And thus we also, if we have any testimony of acceptance

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of us in any part of his worship, should employ it to the same end. Hath God enlarged our hearts in prayer? hath he given us an answer to any of our supplications? hath he refreshed our hearts in the preaching and dispensation of the word, or any other ordinance? We are not to rest in the particular about which we have been communing with him. Our doing so is the cause why we lose our experiences. They lie scattered up and down, separated from their proper root, and so are easily lost. But this is what we should do: improve such particular experiences in the worship of God to the confidence that God has pardoned our sins and accepted our persons; for without trust in him, none of our worship or service can please him or be accepted.

By prescribing worship, God lets us know that he deals with us *upon new terms;* so that, notwithstanding sin, we may enjoy his love and favor. For this we have the engagement of his truth, and he cannot deceive us; but by this command for his worship we should be deceived, if there were not forgiveness with him. For it gives us encouragement to expect, and assurance of finding acceptance with him, which without it cannot be obtained. This, then, God declares by his institution of worship, namely, that there is nothing that shall indispensably hinder those who give up themselves to the obedience of God's commands, from enjoying his love and favor, and communion with him.

The matter of fact is known and confessed, that *God hath appointed* a worship for sinners to perform. All the institutions of the Old and New Testament bear witness hereto. God was the author of them. And men know not what they do when they either neglect them, or would be intermixing their own imaginations with them. What can the mind of man conceive or invent in his worship that may have any influence to secure to the souls of believers their acceptance with God? Is

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there any need of their testimony to the truth, faithfulness and goodness of God? These things he has taken upon himself This, then, should be fixed in our souls, on our first invitation to religious worship, that God will have a new revenue of glory from us, and therefore he declares that there is a way for the removing of our sins, without which we can give no glory to him by our obedience; and this is only by forgiveness.

5. There are *some ordinances of worship appointed* for this very end, to declare to us the forgiveness of sin; especially in the worship instituted by the Lord Jesus in the new testament.

Such is the ordinance of *baptism*. This was accompanied with the dawning of the Gospel in the ministry of John the Baptist. And he expressly declared, in his public ministry, that it was instituted of God to declare the remission of sins. Mark, 1 : 4.

It is true, the Lord Christ submitted to that ordinance, who had no sin, and was baptized by John. But this belonged to the obedience which God required of him, as, for our sakes, he was made under the law. He was to observe all ordinances and institutions of the worship of God; not for any need he had in his own person of the especial ends and significations of some of them; yet as he was our divine surety and Mediator, standing in our stead in all that he so did, he was to yield obedience to them, that so he might "fulfil all righteousness." Matt. 3 : 15. So was he circumcised, so was he baptized; both which had respect unto sin, though absolutely free from all sin in his own person; and that because he had failed in no obedience to any command of God.

But, as was said, baptism itself, as appointed to be an ordinance of worship for sinners to observe, was a declaration of that forgiveness that is with God. It was so in its first institution. God calls a man in a marvel-

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ous and miraculous manner; gives him a ministry from heaven; commands him to go and baptize all those who, confessing their sins and professing repentance of them, should come to him to have a testimony of forgiveness. And as to the especial nature of this ordinance, he appoints it to be such as to represent the certainty and truth of his grace in pardon to their senses by a visible pledge. He lets them know that he would take away their sin, or spiritual pollution, and that by "the washing of regeneration" they shall be saved, as surely as Noah and his family were saved in the ark swimming upon the waters. 1 Peter, 3 : 21. Now, how great a deceit must, in this whole matter, have been practised upon poor sinners, if it were not infallibly certain that they might obtain forgiveness with God.

After the entrance of this ordinance in the ministry of John, the Lord Jesus Christ takes it into his own hand, and commands the observation of it to all his disciples. I inquire not now who are the proper immediate subjects of it; but this, I say, is certain, that in prescribing this ordinance to his church, the great intention of Christ was to ascertain to us the forgiveness of sins. And penitents are invited to a participation of this ordinance, as implying that they may receive the pardon of their sins. This is another engagement of the truth, and faithfulness, and holiness of God, so that we cannot be deceived in this matter. "There is," saith God, "forgiveness with me;" saith the soul, "How, Lord, shall I know, how shall I come to be assured of it? for, by reason of the perpetual accusations of conscience, and the curse of the law upon the guilt of my sin, I find it a very hard matter for me to believe. Like Gideon, I would have a token of it." Why, behold, saith God, "I will give thee a pledge and token of it, which cannot deceive thee. When the world of old had been overwhelmed with a deluge of waters by reason of their

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sins, and those who remained, though they had just cause to fear the same judgment would again befall them or their posterity, because they saw there was like to be the same cause of it, the thoughts and imaginations of the hearts of men being still evil, and that continually; to secure them against these fears, I told them that I would destroy the earth no more with water; and I gave them a token of my faithfulness therein, by placing my bow in the cloud. And have I failed them? Though the sin and wickedness of the world has been, since that day, unspeakably great, yet mankind are not drowned again, nor ever shall be: I will not deceive their expectation from the token I have given them. Wherever, then, there is a word of promise confirmed with a token, never fear a disappointment. But so is this matter. I have declared that there is forgiveness with me; and, to give you assurance thereof, I have ordained this ordinance to confirm my word, and take away all suspicion of your being deceived. As the world shall be drowned no more, so neither shall they who believe come short of forgiveness."

The same is the end of that other great ordinance of the church, *the supper of the Lord*. We have already shown the connection between gospel forgiveness and the death or blood of Jesus Christ. This ordinance, therefore, designed and appointed on purpose for the representation and calling to remembrance of the death of Christ, with the communication of its benefits to them that believe, doth principally intend our faith and comfort in the truth under consideration; and therefore, in the very institution of it, besides the general end before mentioned, which had been sufficient for our security, there is added an especial mention of the forgiveness of sin: for so speaks our Savior in the institution of it, for the use of the church to the end of the world, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for

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many, for the remission of sins." Matt. 26 : 28. As if he had said, "The end for which I have appointed the observance of this duty and service to you is, that I may testify thereby to you, that by my blood, the sacrifice of myself, and the atonement made thereby, I have purchased for you the remission of your sins, of which you shall assuredly be made partakers."

And what is the end of *all church order*, *assemblies* and *worship*? What is a church? Is it not a company of sinners gathered together, according to God's appointment, to give glory and praise to him for pardoning grace, for the forgiveness of sins, and to yield him that obedience which he requires from us, on account of his having so dealt with us? This is the nature, this is the end of a church. He that understands it not, he that uses it not to that end, does but abuse that great institution. And of such abuse the world is full. Some endeavor to gain their own secular advantage through the church. Some discharge the duty required in it, with secret hopes that it shall be their righteousness before God. Some seek to hush their convictions by an empty profession. But the true end, the true use of worship is this: we assemble ourselves, to learn that there is forgiveness with God through Christ; to pray that we may be made partakers of it; to bless and praise God for our interest in it; to engage ourselves to the obedience which he requires on account of it. And were this constantly upon our minds, and in our designs, we might be more established in the faith of it than it may be the most of us are.

6. One particular instance more of this nature shall conclude this evidence. God hath commanded us, the Lord Christ hath taught us, *to pray* for the pardon of sin, which gives us unquestionable security that it may be attained, that it is to be found in God. One of the petitions which our Lord has left on record for our use,

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in that summary of all prayer which he has given us, is, "Forgive us our debts, our trespasses, our sins." Matt. 6 : 11. Some contend that this is a form of prayer to be used in the prescribed words of it; all grant that it is a rule of prayer, comprising the heads of all necessary things that we are to pray for, and obliging us to make supplications for them. So then, upon the authority of God, revealed to us by Jesus Christ, we are bound in duty to pray for pardon of sins, or forgiveness.

On this supposition, it is the highest *reproach of God* to conceive that there is not forgiveness with him for us. Indeed, if we should undertake, without his warrant and authority, to ask any thing at his hand, we might well expect to meet with disappointment; for what should encourage us to any such boldness? But now, when God himself commands us to come and ask any thing from him, so making it our duty, and its neglect our sin against him, to suppose he has not the thing in his power to bestow on us, or that his will is wholly averse from so doing, is to reproach him with want of truth, faithfulness and sincerity. Could God thus deceive and delude his creatures?

To put this whole matter out of question, God has *promised to hear* our prayers, and in particular those which we make to him for the forgiveness of sin. Our Savior has assured us, that what we ask in his name shall be done for us; and has, as we have showed, taught us to ask this very thing of God. But I need not insist on particular promises to this purpose; they are, as you know, multiplied in the Scriptures.

What has been said may suffice to establish our present argument, namely, that God's prescribing religious worship to sinners undeniably proves that with him there is forgiveness. And the design of all this is to encourage poor sinners to believe, and show how inexcusable they will be if, through the power of their lusts

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and unbelief, they still refuse to come to God in Christ, that they may be pardoned. Yea, the unfolding of this truth makes it plain why men perish in their sins. Is it for want of mercy, goodness, grace, or patience in God? Is it through any defect in the mediation of the Lord Christ? Is it for want of the mightiest encouragements and most infallible assurances that with God there is forgiveness? Not at all, but merely on account of their own obstinacy, stubbornness and perverseness: they will not come to this light; yea, they hate it, because their deeds are evil. They will not come to Christ that they may have life. It is merely darkness, blindness, and love of sin that brings men to destruction; and this is laid open, and all pretences and excuses are removed, and the shame of men's lusts exposed, by the full confirmation of this truth, with which God has furnished us. Take heed, you that hear or read these things: if they are not mixed with faith they will add greatly to your misery. Every argument will be your torment.

Moreover, if you will consider what has been now said concerning the nature and end of the worship of God, which you attend to, you may be instructed in the use and due observation of it. When you address yourselves to it, remember that this is what God requires of you as sinners; that this he would not have required, but with thoughts of mercy. Bless him with all your souls, that this is laid as the foundation of all your approaches to him. You are not utterly cast off because you are sinners. Let this support and warm your hearts when you go to hear, to pray, or to any duty of worship. Consider what is your principal work in the whole. You are going to deal with God about forgiveness, in the being, causes, consequences and effects of it. Hearken to what he speaks, declares or reveals about it; mix his revelation and promises with faith.

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Inquire diligently into all the obedience and thankfulness, all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he justly expects from those who are made partakers of it; so shall you observe the worship of God to his glory and your own advantage.

VIII. Another evidence of forgiveness with God may be taken from the making, establishing and ratifying of THE NEW COVENANT. That God would make a new covenant with his people, is often promised. See, among other places, Jer. 31 : 31, 32; and that he has done so the apostle shows at large, Heb. 8 : 9–12. Now, herein sundry things to our present purpose may be considered

1. It is supposed that God had before made *another covenant* with mankind. With reference to that which was before it, and which in comparison is called old, this is said to be new, as the apostle speaks expressly in the place cited. Now, a covenant between God and man is a thing great and marvellous, whether we consider the nature of it, or the ends of it: in its own nature, it is a convention, compact and agreement, for some certain ends and purposes, between the holy Creator and his poor creatures. How infinite, how unspeakable must be the grace and condescension of God in this matter! What is poor miserable man, that God should set his heart upon him, that he should, as it were, give bounds to his sovereignty over him, and enter into terms of agreement with him! For, whereas before, he was a mere object of his absolute dominion, made at his will, and for his pleasure, and for the same reasons to be crushed at any time into nothing; now he has a foundation and ground given him to stand upon, expecting good things from God on account of his faithfulness and righteousness. God, in a covenant, gives those holy properties of his nature to his creatures, as his hand or arm, for them to lay hold of, and by

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them to plead and argue with him. And without this a man could have no foundation for any intercourse or communion with God, or for any expectation from him, or any direction how to deal with him in any of his concerns. Great and signal, then, was the condescension of God, to take his poor creature into covenant with himself. And especially will this be manifest, if we consider the ends of it, and why it is that God thus deals with man. These are no other, than that man might serve him aright, be blessed by him, and be brought to the everlasting enjoyment of him, all to his glory. These are the ends of every covenant that God takes us into with himself; and these are the whole of man. No more is required of us in a way of duty; no more can be required by us to make us blessed and happy, than what is contained in them. That we might live to God, be accepted with him, and come to the eternal fruition of him, is the whole of man; all that we were made for, or are capable of; and these are the ends of every covenant that God makes with man, being all comprised in the solemn declaration that "he will be their God, and they shall be his people."

2. This being the nature, this the end of a covenant, there must be *some great and important cause* to induce God to change, alter and abrogate a covenant once made and established; to lay aside one covenant and to enter into another. And yet this the apostle says expressly that God had done, Heb. 8 : 13, and proves it, because Himself calls that which he promised a new covenant; which undeniably confirms two things: *first*, That the other was become old; and, *secondly*, That being become so, it was changed, altered, and removed.

The first covenant was good, holy and righteous. It was such as it became God to make, and as it was every way the happiness of the creature to accept. We need no other argument to prove it to have been holy and

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good, than that God made it. It was the effect of infinite holiness, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, and grace; and therefore in itself was every way perfect; for so are all the works of God. Besides, it was such that man, while through his own fault he cannot obtain any good by it, and must perish everlastingly by its curse, yet cannot but subscribe to its righteousness and holiness. The tenor of it is contained in the law, and saith the apostle, whatever becomes of the sin and the sinner, "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and just, and good." Rom. 7: 12. Holy in itself, as being the order and constitution of the most holy God. Just and equal with reference to us; such as we have no reason to complain of or to repine against; and the terms of it are most righteous. It is good, and, notwithstanding the appearance of rigor and severity with which it is accompanied, had in it an exceeding mixture of goodness and grace, both in the obedience required in it, and the reward annexed to it.

In particular, it was good, holy, and righteous, *in all its commands*, in the obedience it required. Its precepts were all suited to the principles of the nature of man as created by God, in acting according to which consisted his perfection. God in the first covenant required nothing of man, prescribed nothing to man, but what there was a principle for his doing it ingrafted and implanted in his nature; which rendered all those commands equal, holy, and good. And further, all its commands were proportionate to the strength and ability of those to whom they were given. God, in that covenant, required nothing of any man but what he had before enabled him to perform; nothing above his strength or beyond his power; and thence was it righteous. It was also exceeding good, in respect to its promises and rewards. Do this, saith the covenant; this which thou art able to do, which the principles of thy nature are fit-

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ted for, and inclined to. Well, what shall be the result? Why, do this and live; life is promised to obedience, and that such a life as, both for the present and future condition of the creature, was accompanied with every thing needful to make it blessed and happy. Yea, this life having in it the eternal enjoyment of God, God himself, as a reward, was exceedingly above whatever the obedience of man could require as due, or have any reason to expect, on any other account, but merely of his goodness.

There was *provision in that covenant for the preservation and manifestation of the glory of God*, whatever was the event on the part of man. This was provided for in the wisdom and righteousness of God. Did man continue in his obedience, and fulfil the terms of the covenant? all things were laid in subserviency to the eternal glory of God in his reward. In this would he for ever have manifested and exalted the glory of his holiness, power, faithfulness, righteousness, and goodness. As an almighty Creator and Preserver, as a faithful God and righteous Rewarder, would he have been glorified. On supposition, on the other hand, that man by sin and rebellion should transgress the terms and tenor of this covenant, yet God had made provision that no detriment to his glory should ensue. For by constituting a punishment proportionable in his justice to that sin and demerit, he had provided that the glory of his holiness, righteousness, and veracity in his threatenings, should be exalted, and that to all eternity. God would have lost no more glory and honor by the sin of man than by the sin of angels, which in his infinite wisdom and righteousness is become a great theatre of his eternal glory. For he is no less excellent in his greatness and severity, than in his goodness and power.

Wherefore, we may now return to our former inquiry. All things being thus excellently and admirably dis-

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posed of in infinite wisdom and holiness in this covenant, the whole duty and blessedness of man being fully provided for, and the glory of God secured at all events, what was the reason that God left not all things thus to stand or fall? Wherefore doth he reject and lay aside this covenant, and promise to make another? Certain it is, that he might have continued it with a blessed security to his own glory; and he makes "all things for himself, even the wicked for the day of evil."

God himself shows what was the sole reason of this dispensation. Heb. 8 : 7–13. The sum of it is this: notwithstanding the blessed constitution of the first covenant, there was no *provision for the pardon of sin*, no room or place for forgiveness in it; but on supposition that man sinned, he was in that covenant left remediless. God had not in it revealed that there was any such thing as forgiveness with him; nor had any sinner the least grounds of expectation of any such thing. Die he must, and that without remedy. Now, saith God, this must not be. Mercy, goodness and grace require another state of things; and therefore I will make another covenant with them, by which they shall know and find that there is forgiveness with me, that they may fear me.

Now, next to the blood of Christ, whereby this covenant was ratified and confirmed, this is the greatest evidence that can possibly be given, that there is forgiveness with God. To what end else does God make this great alteration in the effects of his will, in his way of dealing with mankind? As forgiveness of sin is expressly contained in the tenor of this covenant, so, set it aside, and it will be of no more use or advantage than the former. For, as this covenant is made directly with sinners, (nor was there any one in the world when God made it, that was not a sinner; nor is it of use to any but sinners,) so is forgiveness of sins the very life of it

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Hence we may see two things: first, the greatness of forgiveness, that we may learn to value it; and, secondly, the certainty of it, that we may learn to believe it.

1. The *greatness* of it. God would not do so great a thing as that mentioned, but for a great end. Had it not been of the greatest importance to the glory of God and the good of the souls of men, God would not, for the sake of it, have laid aside one covenant and made another. We may evidently see how the heart of God was set upon it, how his nature and will were engaged in it. All this was done that we might be pardoned. The old glorious fabric of obedience and rewards is levelled to the ground, that a new one may be erected for the honor and glory of forgiveness. God forbid that we should have slight thoughts of that which was so strangely and wonderfully produced, in which God as it were embarked his great glory. Shall all this be done for our sakes, and shall we undervalue it? God forbid. God could, if I may so say, more easily have made a new world of innocent creatures, and have governed them by the old covenant, than have established this new one for the salvation of poor sinners; but then where had been the glory of forgiveness? It could never have been known that there was forgiveness with him. The old covenant could not have been preserved and sinners pardoned. Wherefore, God chose rather to change the covenant than that sinners should be unrelieved, grace unexalted, and pardon unexercised. Prize it as you prize your souls, and give glory to God for it, as all those that believe will do unto eternity.

2. Consider the *security* of this covenant, that we may believe it. What greater can be given? God deceiveth no man, any more than he is deceived. And what could God, that cannot lie, do more, to give us satisfaction herein, than he has done? Would you be

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made partakers of this forgiveness? Go to God, spread before him this whole matter, plead with him that he himself has so far laid aside the first covenant of his own gracious will as to make a new one; and that merely because it had no forgiveness in it. This he has made on purpose that it might be known that there is forgiveness in him. And shall not we now be made partakers of it? Will he now deny that to us, of which he has given such assurances? Nothing can here wrong us, nothing can ruin us, but unbelief. Lay hold on this covenant, and we shall have pardon. This God expresses, Isaiah, 27 : 4, 5. Shall we continue on the old ground of the first covenant? All that we can do thereon is but to set thorns and briars in the way of God, to secure ourselves from his coming against us with his indignation and fury. Our sins do but this, and our righteousness is no better. And what will be the issue? both they and we shall be trodden down, consumed, and burnt up. What way then, what remedy is left to us? Only this, of laying hold on the arm and strength of God in that covenant in which forgiveness of sin is provided. In this alone he saith, "Fury is not in me;" and the end will be that we shall have peace with him both here and for ever.

IX. The oath of God, engaged and interposed in this matter, is another evidence of the truth of forgiveness. But as this is annexed to the new covenant just considered, I shall pass it over the more briefly. We may consider,

1. The *nature* of the oath of God. The apostle tells us that he sware by himself; and he gives this reason of it, because he could swear by no greater. Heb. 6 : 13. An oath for the confirmation of any thing is an invocation of a supreme power that can judge of the truth that is spoken, and vindicate the breach of the engage-

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ment. God, "because he could swear by no greater, sware by himself." God does this by express affirmation that he has so sworn by himself, which was the form of the first solemn oath of God, "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord." Gen. 22 : 16. The meaning of which is, "I have taken it upon myself, as I am God; or let me not be so if I perform not this thing." "The Lord of hosts hath sworn by himself." Jer. 51 : 14. God also does this by the especial interposition of some such property of his nature as is suited to give credit and confirmation to the word spoken; as of his holiness, "I have sworn by my holiness." Psalm 89 : 35. So also Amos, 4 : 2. Sometimes by his life: "As I live," saith the Lord. In the Hebrew, "I live," saith God, it shall be so. And sometimes by his name, Jer. 44 : 2–6. God, as it were, engages the honor and glory of the properties of his nature for the certain accomplishment of the things mentioned. This is evident from the manner of the expression, as in Psalm 89 : 35. "Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David."

2. The *end* or design of his oath. God doth not give it to make his word or promise steadfast, but to give assurance and security to us of their accomplishment. Every word of God is sure and certain truth itself, because it is his; and he might justly require of us the belief of it, without any further attestation. But yet, knowing what great objections Satan and our own unbelieving hearts will raise against his promises, at least as to our own interest in them, to confirm our minds, and to take away all pretence of unbelief, he interposes his oath in this matter. What can remain of distrust in such a case? If there be a matter in doubt between men, and an oath be interposed in the confirmation of what is called in question, it is to them, as the apostle tells us, an end of all strife. Heb. 6 : 16.

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How much more ought it to be so in respect to God, when his oath is engaged! And the apostle declares this end of his oath, it is to show the immutability of his counsel. Heb. 6 : 17. His counsel was declared before in the promise; but now some doubt may arise whether, on one occasion or other, God may not change his counsel; or whether he has not changed it, with such conditions as to render it useless to us. In what case soever it be, to remove all doubts and suspicions of this nature, God adds his oath, manifesting the unquestionable immutability of his counsel and promises. What, therefore, is thus confirmed, is ascertained to the height of what any thing is capable of; and not to believe it is the height of impiety.

3. In this interposition of God by an oath there is un unspeakable *condescension of grace*, which is both a great motive to faith, and a great aggravation of unbelief. For what are we, that the holy and blessed God should thus condescend, for our satisfaction and surety, to engage himself by an oath! It is an inestimable advantage that God should, for our sakes, engage himself by his oath. So it will be our misery, if we believe him not when he swears to us. What can we now object against what is thus confirmed? What pretence or excuse can we have for unbelief? How just, how righteous, how holy is God in the destruction of those who, upon this strange, wonderful and unexpected warrant, refuse to set to their seal that God is true.

These things being premised, we may consider *how variously* God has engaged his oath that there is forgiveness with him. He sweareth that he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he repent and live: "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner." Ezek. 33 : 11. Now, without forgiveness in him, every sinner must die, and that without remedy. Confirming, therefore, with his oath, that

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it is his will the sinner should return, repent, and live, he, in the first place, swears by himself, that there is forgiveness with him for those sinners that shall so repent and turn to him.

Again, whereas the great means he has appointed for the forgiveness of sin is by the mediation of the Lord Christ, as we shall afterwards show, he hath, on several occasions, confirmed his purpose in him, and the counsel of his will by his oath. By this oath he promised him to Abraham and David of old, which proved the foundation of the church's stability in all generations; and also of their security and assurance of acceptance with him; see Luke, 1 : 73–75. And in his taking upon him that office, whereby, in an especial manner, the forgiveness of sins was to be procured, namely, of his being a Priest to offer sacrifice, to make an atonement for sinners, God confirmed it to him, and him in it, by his oath: "He was not made a priest without an oath." Heb. 7 : 20. And to what end? namely, that he might be a "surety of a better testament," ver. 22. And what was that "better testament?" Why, that which brought along with it the forgiveness of sin, chap. 8 : 12, 13. So that it was forgiveness which was so confirmed by the oath of God. Further, the apostle shows that the great original promise made to Abraham being confirmed by the oath of God, all his other promises were in like manner confirmed. Whence he draws that blessed conclusion which we have, Heb. 6 : 17, 18. As to every one, saith he, that "flies for refuge to the hope that is set before him," that is, who seeks to escape the guilt of sin, the curse and sentence of the law, by applying himself to God in Christ for pardon, he has the oath of God to secure him that he shall not fail. Thus does the oath of God testify to the forgiveness of sin; which we have shown to be the highest security on this point that God can give, or that we are capable of receiving.

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CHAPTER X.

EVIDENCES OF FORGIVENESS—*continued.*

X. Another foundation and infallible evidence of the truth, that there is forgiveness with God, may be taken from that especial name and title which He takes to himself; he owns the name of the "GOD OF PARDONS," or the "GOD OF FORGIVENESS." So is he called, Neh. 9:17, where we have rendered the words, "Thou art a God ready to forgive;" but they are, as was said, in the Hebrew, "And thou art a God of pardons," forgiveness, or propitiations. This is his name, which he owns, of which he accepts the ascription to himself; the name whereby he will be known. And here let us consider how God manifests himself to us by his name.

1. The name of God is that whereby he *reveals himself to us*, whereby he would have us know him and own him. It is something expressive of his nature or properties, which he has appropriated to himself. Whatever, therefore, any name of God expresses him to be, that he is, that we may expect to find him; for he will not deceive us by giving himself a wrong or a false name. And on this account he requires us to trust in his name, because he will assuredly be found to us what his name imports. Resting on his name, flying to his name, calling upon his name, praising his name, things so often mentioned in the Scripture, confirm the same to us. These things could not be our duty, if we might be deceived in so doing. God is and will be to us what his name declares.

2. On this ground, then, God is said to be known by any name, when those to whom he reveals himself do, in an especial manner, rest on that name by faith, and

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have that accomplished towards them which that name imports. God did not, under the Old Testament, reveal himself to any by the name of the "Father of Jesus Christ," or the "Son incarnate," because the grace of it was not to be accomplished to them, "God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect;" they were not entrusted with the full revelation of God by all his blessed names. Neither doth God call us to trust in any name of his, however declared or revealed, unless he gives it us in an especial manner, by way of covenant, to rest upon.

So he speaks, Exod. 6 : 3. "I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and to Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah was I not known unto them." It is certain that both these names of God, El-shaddai and Jehovah, were known among his people before. In the first mention we have of Abraham's addressing himself to the worship of God, he makes use of the name Jehovah, "He built an altar unto Jehovah," Gen. 12 : 7, and so afterwards, not only does Moses make use of that name in the repetition of the story, but it was also of frequent use among them. Whence, then, is it said that God appeared to them by the name of El-shaddai, but not by the name of Jehovah? The reason is, because that was the name which God gave himself in the solemn confirmation of the covenant with Abraham. Gen. 17 : 1. "I am El-shaddai, God Almighty," God All-sufficient. And when Isaac would pray for the blessing of the covenant on Jacob, he makes use of that name, "God Almighty bless thee." Gen. 28 : 3. He invokes that name of God which was engaged in the covenant made with his father Abraham and himself. That therefore we may, with full assurance, rest on the name of God, it is not only necessary that God reveal that name to be his, but

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also that he give it out to us for the end and purpose, that we may know him thereby, and place our trust and confidence in him, according to what that name imports. And this was the case wherever he revealed himself to any in a peculiar manner, by an especial name.

So he did to Jacob, "I am the God of Abraham and Isaac," Gen. 28 : 13; assuring him, that as he had dealt faithfully in his covenant with his fathers Abraham and Isaac, so also he would deal with him: and, Gen. 31 : 13, "I am the God of Bethel;" he who appeared to thee there, and blessed thee, and will continue so to do. But when the same Jacob comes to ask after another name of God, he answers him not; as it were commanding him to live by faith on what he was pleased to reveal. Now, then, God had not made himself known to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, by his name Jehovah, because he had not peculiarly called himself to them by that name; nor engaged it in his covenant with them, although it were otherwise known to them. They lived and rested on the name of God Almighty, as suited to their support and consolation in their wandering, helpless condition, before the promise was to be accomplished: but now, when God came to fulfil his promises, and to bring the people, by virtue of his covenant, into the land of Canaan, he reveals himself to them by, and renews his covenant with them in the name of Jehovah. And hereby God declared that he came to give stability and accomplishment to his promises; to which end they were now to live upon this name of Jehovah, in an expectation of the fulfilling of the promises, as their fathers did on that of God Almighty, in an expectation of protection from him in their wandering state.

Hence this name became the foundation of the Jewish church, and the ground of the faith of those who sincerely believed in God. And it is strangely fallen out

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in the providence of God, that since the Jews have rejected the covenant of their fathers, and are cast out of the covenant for their unbelief, they have shunned that name of God. I know themselves and others pretend strange mysteries in the letters and vowels of that name, which make it ineffable. But the truth is, being cast out of that covenant, which was built and established on that name, in the just judgment of God, through their own blindness and superstition, they are no more able to make mention of it. It is required, then, that the name of God be given to us as engaged in covenant, to secure our expectation that he will be to us according to his name.

3. *The whole gracious name of God*, every title that he hath given himself, every ascription of honor to himself that he has owned, *is confirmed to us* (to as many as believe) *in Jesus Christ*. For as he hath declared to us the whole name of God, John, 17 : 6, so not this or that promise of God, but "all the promises of God are, in him, yea and amen." So that as of old every particular promise that God made to the people served especially for the particular occasion on which it was given, and each name of God was to be rested on as to that dispensation under which it was suited to give relief and confidence; as the name of El-shaddai to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the name Jehovah to Moses and the people; so now, by Jesus Christ and in him, every particular promise belongs to believers in all their circumstances; and every name of God whatever is theirs, at all times, to rest upon, and put their trust in. Thus the particular promise made to Joshua, at his entrance into Canaan, to encourage and strengthen him in the great enterprise of conquering the land, is by the apostle applied to all believers, in all their occasions whatever: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Heb. 13 : 5. So likewise doth every name of God be-

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long now to us, as if it had in a particular manner been engaged in covenant to us; and that because the whole covenant is ratified and confirmed to us by Jesus Christ. 2 Cor. 6 : 18; 7 : 1. This, then, absolutely secures to us an interest in the name of God, the God of forgiveness, as if it had been given to every one of us to assure us of this.

4. God takes this name, *the God of forgiveness*, to be his in a peculiar manner, as that whereby he will be known. He appropriates it to himself, as expressing that which the power and goodness of no other can extend to. "There are lords many, and gods many," saith the apostle; some that are called so; such as some account so to be. How is the true God distinguished from these gods? He is so by this name, he is the "God of pardons." Micah, 7 : 18. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?" This is his perogative; herein none is equal to him, like to him, or a sharer with him. Who is a God like unto thee, that may be called a "God of pardons?" The vanities of the nations cannot give them this rain; they have no refreshing showers of mercy and pardon in their power. Neither angels, nor saints, nor images, nor popes, can pardon sin. By this name doth he distinguish himself from them all.

5. To be known by this name, is the great *glory of God* in this world. When Moses desired to see the glory of God, the Lord told him, "that he could not see his face." Exod. 33 : 18–20. The face of God, or the glorious majesty of his being, his essential glory, is not to be seen by any in this life; we cannot see him as he is. But the glorious manifestation of himself we may behold and contemplate. This we may see as the back parts of God; that shadow of his excellences which he casteth forth in passing by us in his works and dispensations. This Moses shall see. And wherein did it

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consist? Why, in the revelation and declaration of this name of God, "The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," chap. 34 : 6, 7. To be known by this name, to be honored, feared, believed, as that declares him, is the great glory of God. And shall this fail us? Can we be deceived in trusting in it, or in expecting that we shall find him to be what his name declares? God forbid.

Let us lay together these considerations, and we shall find that they will give us another stable foundation of the truth insisted on; and a great encouragement to poor sinful souls to draw nigh to God in Christ for pardon. God hath no name but what he gives unto himself. Nor is it lawful to know him or call him otherwise; as he calls himself, so is he. What his name imports, so is his nature. Every name, also, of God is engaged in Jesus Christ in the covenant, and is proposed to us to place our trust and confidence in. Now this is his name and his memorial, even the God of forgiveness. By this he distinguishes himself from all others, and expresses it as the principal title of his honor, or his peculiar glory. According to this name, therefore, all that believe shall assuredly find "there is forgiveness with him."

XI. The consideration of THE ESSENTIAL PROPERTIES OF THE NATURE OF GOD, and what is required to the manifestation of them, will afford us further assurance of his forgiveness. And here we observe,

1. God being absolutely perfect and absolutely self-sufficient, was eternally glorious, and satisfied in his own holy excellences and perfections, before, and without the creation of any thing, by the exercise of his al-

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mighty power. The making, therefore, of all things depends on a mere sovereign act of *the will and pleasure of God.* So the whole creation makes its acknowledgment, ' Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, honor and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." Rev. 4 : 11; 5 : 12. God could have omitted all this great work without the least impeachment of his glory. Not one holy property of his nature would have been diminished in its eternal glory by that omission. This then depended on a pure act of his will and choice.

2. On supposition that God would work,—by his power produce any thing without himself,—it was absolutely necessary that *himself should be the end* of his so doing. For, as before the production of all things there was nothing that could be the end why any of them should be brought forth out of nothing, or towards which they should be disposed; so God being an infinite agent, in wisdom, and understanding, and power, he could have no end in his actings but that which also is infinite. It is therefore natural and necessary to God to do all things for himself. It is impossible he should have any other end; and he hath done so accordingly. "The Lord hath made all things for himself." Prov. 16 : 4. He aimed at himself in all that he did; there being no other infinite good for him to make his object and end but himself alone.

3. This doing things, all things, for himself, cannot intend an addition thereby of any new real good unto himself; his absolute eternal perfection and all-sufficiency render this impossible. God doth not become more powerful, great, wise, just, holy, good or gracious, by any of his works; he can add nothing to himself. It must therefore be *the manifestation* and declaration of the holy properties of his nature that he intends in his works. In order to this two things are requisite:

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That he *make them known:* that by ways suited to his infinite wisdom he both declare that such properties belong to him, and what is their nature as far as the creature is able to apprehend it. He works to make known his power, to declare his name through the earth. Rom. 9: 17–22. So it is said, that by the works of creation "that which may be known of God" is made manifest. Rom. 1: 19, 20. And what is that? Even the natural essential properties of his being; his "eternal power and Godhead." To this head are referred all those promises of God that he would glorify himself, and the prayers of his saints that he would do so, and the attestations in the Scripture that he hath done so. He hath made known his wisdom, holiness, power, goodness, self-sufficiency, and similar perfections of his nature. He must also

Obtain an ascription of praise and glory to himself upon their account. His design is to be "admired in all them that believe," 2 Thess. 1: 10; that is, that with an apprehension of his excellences, and as he hath revealed them, they should admire, adore, glorify and praise him, worship, believe in and trust him in all things, and seek the enjoyment of him as an eternal reward.

Even *the inanimate and the animal* creation ascribe unto God the glory of his properties, by what they are and do. By what they are, and their obeying the law of their nature, they give unto God the glory of that wisdom and power whereby they are made, and of that sovereignty whereon they depend. Hence nothing more frequent in the praises of God of old than the calling of the inanimate creatures, heaven and earth, winds, storms, thunder, and the beasts of the field, to give praise and glory to God: that is, by what they are they do so, inasmuch as from the impression of God's glorious excellences upon them they are made manifest.

Involuntary praise is also rendered by some rational

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creatures. Sinning men and angels have no design, no will, no desire to give glory to God. They do their utmost to the contrary, to reproach and blaspheme him. But they cannot cast off the yoke of God from their minds and consciences; they are forced, and shall be for ever, to acknowledge that God is infinitely holy, infinitely wise, powerful and righteous. And he has the glory of all these properties from them in their very desires that he were otherwise. When they would that God were not just to punish them, powerful to torment them, wise to find them out, holy to be displeased with their lusts and sins, they do at the same time, in the same thing, own, acknowledge, and give unto God the glory of his being, justice, wisdom, power and holiness. When, therefore, God has made known his properties, the ascription of glory unto him on their account is, to rational creatures, natural and unavoidable.

A *voluntary* praise is also rendered in the reasonable service, worship, fear, trust, obedience of angels and men. God having revealed unto them the properties of his nature, they acknowledge and adore them, and place their confidence in them, and thereby glorify him as God. We do this in making the excellences of God, revealed unto us, the principle and chief object of all the moral actings of our souls, and of all the actings of our affections. To fear the Lord and his goodness, and to fear him for his goodness; to trust in his power and faithfulness, to obey his authority, to delight in his will and grace, to love him above all, because of his excellences and beauty, this is to glorify him. Why do we pray and long for the accomplishment of the promises of God towards his saints, and of his threatenings towards his enemies, for the fulfilling of the glorious works of his power and grace that yet remain to be done, for the coming of the kingdom of Christ, for the approach of glory? Is it not chiefly and principally that the glorious excellen-

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ces of God's nature may be made more manifest, be more known, more exalted; that God may appear more as he is, and as he hath declared himself to be? This is to give glory to God. So likewise, our joy, rejoicing, and satisfaction, in any of the ways and works of God, are solely on this account, that in them God, in his power, wisdom, holiness, is made known. We glorify him in our joint actual celebration of his praises; which, as it is a duty of the greatest importance, and to which we are most frequently exhorted, so in its nature it consists in a believing, rejoicing expression of what God is, and what he doeth; that is, our admiring, adoring, and blessing him, because of his holiness, goodness, and the rest of his properties, and his works of grace and power suitable to them. This it is to praise God, Rev. 5 : 12, 13.

4. Observe, that none of these properties of God can be thus manifested and known, nor himself be glorified for them, but by his declaration of them, and by their effects. We know no more of God than he is pleased to reveal unto us. I mean not mere revelation by his word, but by any ways or means, whether by his word, or by his works, or by impressions from the law of nature upon our hearts and minds. And whatever God thus declares of himself, he does it by exercising and manifesting the effects of it. So we know his power, wisdom, goodness and grace, by their effects, or the works of God that proceed from them, and are suited to them. And whatever is in God that is not thus made known, we cannot apprehend, nor glorify God on account of it. God therefore doing all things, as hath been showed, for the glory of these his properties, he doth so reveal them and make them known.

5. Upon this design of God, it is necessary that he should reveal and make known all the attributes and properties of his nature, in works and effects peculiarly proceeding from them, and answering unto them, that

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he might be glorified in them; and which, as the event manifests, he hath done accordingly. For what reason can be imagined why God will be glorified in one essential excellency of his nature and not in another? Especially must this be affirmed of those properties of the nature of God which the event manifests his principal glory to consist in and arise from, and the knowledge of which is of the greatest benefit to the children of men, in reference to his design towards them.

6. These things being so, let us consider how it stands in reference to that which is under consideration. God, in the creation of all things, glorified or manifested his greatness, power, wisdom and goodness, with many other of his attributes. But his sovereignty, righteousness and holiness, how are they declared hereby? Either not at all, or not in so evident a manner as is necessary, that he might be fully glorified in them, or for them. What then doth he do? Leave them in darkness, veiled, undiscovered, satisfying himself in the glory of those properties which his work of creation had made known? Was there any reason why he should do so, since he designed to do all things for himself, and for his own glory? No; hence he gave his holy law as a rule of obedience to men and angels. This plainly reveals his sovereignty or authority over them, his holiness and righteousness in the equity and purity of things he required of them; so that in and by these properties also he may be glorified. As he made all things for himself, that is, for the manifestation of his greatness, power, wisdom and goodness, so he gave the law for himself, that is, for the manifestation of his authority, holiness and righteousness. But is this all? Is there not remunerative justice in God, in a way of bounty? Is there not vindictive justice in him, in a way of severity? There is so, and in the pursuit of the design mentioned they also are to be manifested, or God will not be glorified in them.

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This, therefore, he did also in the rewards and punishments that he annexed unto the law of obedience that he had prescribed. To manifest his remunerative justice, he promised a reward in a way of bounty, of which the angels that sinned not were made partakers; and in the penalty threatened, which sinning angels and men incurred, he revealed his vindictive justice in a way of severity. So are all these properties of God made known by their effects, and so is God glorified in them.

But after all this, are there no other properties of his nature, divine excellences, that cannot be separated from his being, which by none of these means are so much as once intimated to be in him? It is evident that there are; such are mercy, grace, patience, long-suffering, compassion, and the like: concerning which, observe,

That where there are no objects of them, they cannot be declared or exercised. As God's power or wisdom could not be manifest if there were no objects of them, no more can his grace or mercy. If none ever stand in need of them, they can never be exercised, and consequently never be known. Therefore they are not revealed, either by the creation of all things, or by the law or its sanction, or by the law written in our hearts. For all these suppose no objects of grace and mercy. It is sinners only, and such as have made themselves miserable by sin, towards whom they can be exercised.

Again, there are no excellences of God's nature more expressive of divine goodness, loveliness and beauty, than these of mercy, grace, long-suffering and patience; and therefore there is nothing in which God so requires our likeness to him, in our conformity to his image, as in these, namely, mercy, grace and readiness to forgive: and the contrary frame in any he doth of all things most abhor: "They shall have judgment without mercy, who showed no mercy." Therefore it is certain that God will be glorified in the manifestation of these properties of his nature.

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And further, these properties can be no otherwise exercised, and consequently no otherwise known, but only in and by the pardon of sin; which puts it beyond all question that there is forgiveness with God. God will not lose the glory of these his excellences; he will be revealed in them, he will be known by them, he will be glorified for them; which he could not be, if there were not forgiveness with him; so that here comes in, not only the truth, but also the necessity of forgiveness.

XII. We proceed to that evidence of forgiveness with God, which is the centre in which all the lines of the foregoing meet; the fountain of all those streams of refreshment which they contain—GOD'S SENDING HIS SON. The consideration of this will leave no pretence or excuse for unbelief. To make this evidence more clear, we must consider what was the rise of this sending; who it was that was sent; how he was sent; and to what end and purpose.

1. *The rise and spring* of it is to be considered. It came forth from the eternal mutual consent and counsel of the Father and the Son, "The counsel of peace shall be between them both." Zech. 6; 13. It is of Christ the Branch, of whom the prophet speaks. "He shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and shall be a Priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both;" that is, between God the Father, who sends him, and himself; there lay the counsel of peace-making between God and man, in due time accomplished by him who "is our peace." Eph. 2:14. So he speaks, "Then I was by him, as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth; and my delights were with the sons of men." Prov. 8:30, 31. These are the words of Wis-

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dom, that is, of the Son of God. When was this done? "Then I was with him"—before the mountains were settled, "whilst as yet he had not made the earth nor the fields;" that is, before the creation of the world, or from eternity, ver. 25, 26. But how then could he rejoice in the habitable parts of the earth? and how could his delight be with the sons of men, seeing as yet they were not? I answer, it was the counsel of peace towards them before mentioned, in accordance with which he was to be sent to converse amongst them on the earth. He rejoiced in the fore-thoughts of his being sent to them, and the work he had to do for them. Then, with his own consent and delight, was he foreordained to his work, even before the "foundation of the world," 1 Pet. 1:20; and received of the Father "the promise of eternal life, even before the world began," Tit. 1:2, that is, to be given to sinners, by way of forgiveness through his blood. So is this whole counsel expressed, Psalm 40:7, 8. Whence it is made use of by the apostle, "Then said I, Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O God." Thy law is in my heart. Heb. 10:5, 6, 7. There is the will of the Father in this matter, and the law of its performance; and there is the will of the Son in answer thereunto, and his delight in fulfilling that law which was prescribed to him.

Let us now consider to what purpose was this eternal counsel of peace, this agreement of the Father and Son from eternity, about the state and condition of mankind. If God would have left them all to perish under the guilt of their sins, there had been no need at all of any such thoughts, design or counsel. God had given to them a law, righteous and holy, which if they transgressed, he had threatened them with eternal destruction. Under the rule and power of this law he might have righteously left them to stand or fall, ac-

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cording to its verdict and sentence. But now he assures us, he reveals to us, that he had other thoughts in this matter; that there were other counsels between the Father and the Son concerning us; and these such as the Son was delighted in the prospect of accomplishing. What can these thoughts and counsels be, but about a way for their deliverance, which could no otherwise be but by the forgiveness of sins? For if God mark iniquities, none can stand. Hearken, therefore, poor sinner, and have hope. God is consulting about thy deliverance and freedom; and what cannot the wisdom and grace of the Father and Son accomplish? For to this end was the Son sent into the world, which is the second thing proposed to consideration.

2. *Whom* did God send? The Scripture lays great weight and emphasis on this consideration; faith must do so also: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son," John, 3:16; so 1 John, 4:9, "In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotton Son into the world, that we might live through him." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." And who is this that is thus sent, and called "the only-begotten Son of God?" Take a double description of him, one out of the Old Testament, and another from the New. The first from Isa. 9:6, "To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace:" the other from Heb. 1:2, 3, "God hath spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds. Who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat

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down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." This is he who was sent. In nature he was glorious, even God over all, blessed for ever. In answerableness to the Father, the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person; possessed of all the same essential properties with him; so that what we find in him, we may be assured is in the Father also; for he that hath seen him, hath seen the Father, who is in him. In power, omnipotent; for he hath made all things, and upholdeth all things, with an unspeakable facility, by the word of his power: in office, exalted over all; sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high: in name, the mighty God, the everlasting Father; so that whatever he came about, he will assuredly fulfil; for what should hinder this mighty One from perfecting his design?

Here is a near and a particular object for faith to be exercised about, and to rest in. Wherefore did this glorious Son of God come and tabernacle amongst poor sinners? We beheld the glory of the eternal Word, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father; and he was made flesh, and pitched his tabernacle amongst us. John, 1 : 14. To what end? It was no other but to accomplish the eternal counsel of peace towards sinners before mentioned, to procure for them, and to declare to them, the forgiveness of sin. And what greater assurance can we have that there is forgiveness with God for us? He himself has told us, that giving an only-begotten and beloved Son affords assured testimony of reality and sincerity in the thing that is confirmed by it. So he says to Abraham, "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thy only son, from me." Gen. 22 : 12. In this way it may be known, or no way. And there is a blessed conclusion that faith may make from this consideration: Now I know that there is forgiveness with

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God, seeing that he hath not withheld his Son, his only Son, that he might accomplish it. To this purpose the apostle teaches us to reason, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Rom. 8 : 32.

What further can any soul desire? What ground remains for unbelief to stand upon in this matter? Is there any thing more to be done? It was to manifest that there is forgiveness with him, and to make way for the exercise of it, that God sent his Son; that the Son of God came into the world.

3. To this sending of the Son of God for this purpose, there is evidence and security added from *the manner* wherein he was sent. How was this? Not in glory, not in an open discovery of his eternal power and Godhead. Had it been so, we might have thought that he had come merely to glorify himself in the world. And this he might have done, without thoughts of mercy or pardon towards us. But he came quite in another manner; he was seen in the "likeness of sinful flesh," Rom. 8 : 3, "in the form of a servant," Phil. 2 : 7, "being made of a woman, made under the law." Gal. 4 : 4. What he endured in that condition, is in some measure known to us all. All this could not be merely for himself. All that he expected at the close of it, was, "to be glorified with that glory which he had with the Father before the world was." John, 17 : 5. It must then be for our sakes; and for what? To save and deliver us from that condition of wrath at present, and future expectation of vengeance, into which we had cast ourselves by sin; that is, to procure for us the forgiveness of sins. Had not God designed pardon for sin, he would never have sent his Son in this manner to testify it; and he did it because it could in no other way be brought about. Do we doubt whether there is forgiveness with God? or whe-

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ther we shall obtain it, if we address ourselves to him to be made partakers of it? Then let us consider the condition of his Son in the world; review his afflictions, poverty, temptation, sorrows, sufferings; and ask if we can find any other design in it, any other reason, cause, or necessity of it, but only and merely to testify and declare that there is forgiveness with God, and to purchase and procure the communication of it to us.

4. Besides all this, there ensues that great and wonderful issue, *the death* of the Son of God. This event was great and marvellous, and we may inquire what was designed by it. On this point the Scriptures fully show,

That he died *to make atonement* for sin, or reconciliation for iniquity. Dan. 9 : 24. He gave his life a ransom for the sins of many. Matt. 20 : 28; 1 Tim. 2 : 6. He was in it made sin, that others might become the righteousness of God in him. 2 Cor. 5 : 21; Rom. 8 : 3. Therein he bare our "sins in his own body on the tree." 1 Peter, 2 : 24. This was the state of the matter. Notwithstanding all the love, grace, and condescension before mentioned, yet our sins were so directly opposed to the justice and holiness of God, that unless atonement were made, and a price of redemption paid, there could be no pardon, no forgiveness obtained. This, therefore, he undertook to do, and that by the sacrifice of himself; answering all that was prefigured by, and represented in, the sacrifices of old, as the apostle largely declares, Heb. 10 : 5–9. In this sacrifice of himself forgiveness in God is exemplified so clearly and evidently, that he who cannot read it will be cursed unto eternity: yea, he must be cursed; for what more can be required to justify God in his eternal destruction? He that will not believe his grace, as testified and exemplified in the blood of his Son, must perish without remedy.

The curse and sentence of the law lie on record

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against sinners: it puts in its demand against our acquittance. and lays an obligation upon us to punishment: and God will not reject nor destroy his law: unless it be answered, there is no acceptance for sinners. This, therefore, in the next place, his death was designed unto: as he satisfied and made atonement by it unto justice, (which was the fountain, spring, and cause of the law,) so he *fulfilled and answered the demands of the law*, as it was an effect of the justice of God: so Rom. 8 : 3. He suffered in the likeness of sinful flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled and answered. He answered the curse of the law when he was "made a curse for us," Gal. 3 : 13; and so became, as to the obedience of the law, "the end of the law for righteousness to them that believe." Rom. 10 : 3, 4. And as to the penalty that it threatened, he bore it, removed it, and took it out of the way. So hath he made way for forgiveness through the very heart of the law; it hath not one word to speak against the pardon of those who believe. But,

Sinners are under the *power of Satan;* he lays a claim to them, and by what means shall they be rescued from his dominion? This also his death was designed to accomplish: for as he was "manifested to destroy the works of the devil," 1 John, 3 : 8, so by "death he destroyed him that had the power of death," Heb. 2 : 14, that is, despoiled him of his power, destroyed his dominion, took away his claim to sinners that believe.

5. Is this all? did his work cease in his death? did he do no more for securing the forgiveness of sins? Yea, *he lives* also after death *for the same end and purpose*. The Son of God, in the nature which he assumed to expiate sin by death, lives again after death, to secure to us, and to complete the forgiveness of sins. Being raised from death, he evinces and testifies to us that he hath fully performed the work he undertook; for

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had he not answered the guilt of sin by his death, he had never been raised from it. He also lives after death a mediatory life, to make intercession for us, that we may receive the forgiveness of sin, as also himself to give it to us.

Thus, then, stands this matter; the Son of God was sent that mercy might have a way to exercise itself in forgiveness consistently with the righteousness and law of God. Now, here is the greatest work that God ever performed or ever will. It was the most eminent product of infinite wisdom, goodness, grace, and power. And herein do all the excellencies of God shine forth more gloriously than in all the works of his hands. Let us then wisely ponder and consider this matter; let us bring our own souls with their objections to this evidence, and see what exceptions we have to make against it. I know nothing will satisfy unbelief; its design is to make the soul find that to be so hereafter which it would persuade it of here, namely, that there is no forgiveness in God. And Satan, who cherishes this unbelief, knows full well that there is no forgiveness for those who will not believe that there is any. For it will, at the last day, be unto men according unto their faith or unbelief. He that believeth, and he that believeth not that there is forgiveness with God, shall each realize the same in his own experience. But what can be excepted against this evidence, the foundation of our faith in this matter? God hath not sent his Son in vain, which yet he must have done, as we have showed, had he not designed to manifest and exercise forgiveness towards sinners. Wherefore, to confirm our faith, let us search into these things in some particular inquiries.

Question 1. Seeing the Son of God died, according to the determinate counsel and will of God, wherefore did he do so, and what aimed he at therein?

Answer. It is plain that he died for our sins, Rom.

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4 : 25; that is, to make reconciliation for the sins of his people. Heb. 2 : 17, 18. This Moses and the prophets, this the whole Scriptures testify to; and without supposing it not one word can be aright believed, nor can we yield any due obedience to God.

Qu. 2. What then did Christ bear? What was the transaction between God as the Judge of all, and him as the Mediator of the church?

Ans. God indeed "laid on him the iniquities of us all," Isa. 53 : 6; yea, he made him "a curse for us." Gal. 3 : 13. And making him a sin-offering, or an "offering for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh." Rom. 8 : 3; 2 Cor. 5 : 21. So that what the justice or law of God demanded in the punishment due to sin, was laid on him.

Qu. 3. What then did Christ do in his death? What did he aim at and design? What was his intention in submitting to the will of God in these things?

Ans. "He bare our sins in his own body on the tree." 1 Pet. 2 : 24. He took our sins upon him, undertook to answer for them, to make an end of the difference about them between God and sinners. Dan. 9 : 24. His aim undoubtedly was, by all that he suffered, so to make atonement for sin as that no more could in that respect be expected.

Qu. 4. Had God any more to require of sinners on account of sin, that his justice might be satisfied, his holiness vindicated, his glory exalted, his honor repaired, than what he charged on Christ? Did he lay a part of the penalty due to sin on him, execute some part of the curse of the law against him, and yet reserve some wrath for sinners themselves?

Ans. No, doubtless. He came to do the whole will of God. Heb. 10, 7 : 8. And God spared him not any thing that in his holy will he required as an atonement for sin. Rom. 8 : 32. He would never have so dealt with his Son, to have made a half-work of it; nor is the

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work of making satisfaction for sin such as that any, the least part of it, can ever be undertaken by another. Nothing is more injurious or blasphemous against God and Christ, than the foolish imagination among the papists, of works satisfactory for the punishment due to sin, or any part of it; or of their purgatory-pains expiating any remaining guilt after this life. This work, of making satisfaction for sin, is such as no creature in heaven or earth can put forth a hand unto. It was wholly committed to the Son of God, who alone was able to undertake it, and who hath perfectly accomplished it. So that God now says, "Fury is not in me," Isa. 27 : 4; he that will lay hold on my strength, that he may have peace, he shall have peace.

Qu. 5. Did the Lord Christ then go through with his undertaking? Or did he faint under it? Did he only testify his love, and show his good-will for our deliverance? Or did he also effectually pursue it, and not faint until he had made a way for the exercise of forgiveness?

Ans. It was not possible that he should be detained by the pains of death. Acts, 2 : 24. He knew beforehand that he should be carried through his work, that he should not be forsaken in it, nor faint under it. Isa. 50 : 6–8. And God hath given this unquestionable evidence of his discharge of the debt of sin to the utmost, in that he was raised from the dead. For he that is given up to prison upon the sentence of the law for the debt of sin, shall not be freed until he have paid the utmost farthing. This, therefore, he manifested himself to have done, by his resurrection from the dead.

Qu. 6. What then is now become of him? Where is he, and what is he doing? Hath he done his work, and laid it aside? or doth he still continue to carry it on unto its perfection?

Ans. It is true he was dead, but he is alive, and lives for ever; and hath told us, that because he liveth we

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shall live also; and that, because this is the end of his mediatory life in heaven, he lives "for ever to make intercession for us," Heb. 7 : 25–27; and to this end, that the forgiveness of sin, which he hath procured for us, may be communicated unto us, that we might be made partakers of it, and live for ever.

What ground is left of questioning the truth before us? What link of this chain can unbelief break? If men resolve, notwithstanding all this evidence, that they will not believe there is forgiveness with God, or will not be encouraged to attempt securing it to themselves, or despise it as a thing unworthy of their regard; it is enough for them that declare it, that preach these things, that they are a sweet savor unto God in them that perish, as well as in them that are saved. And I bless God that I have had this opportunity to bear testimony to the grace of God in Christ, which, if it be not received, it is because "the god of this world hath blinded the eyes of men, that the light of the gospel of the glory of God should not shine into their minds." But Christ will be glorified in them that believe on these principles and foundations.

XIII. Another evidence of forgiveness with God may be derived from the fact that He REQUIRES FORGIVENESS IN US, that we should forgive one another; and therefore doubtless there is forgiveness with him for us.

1. It is certain that God *has required* this of us; the testimonies are many and known, so that they need not be particularly insisted on. See Luke, 17 : 3, 4; Eph. 4 : 32; Matt. 18 : 24, unto the end. There are some things, however, that give a singular emphasis to this command, manifesting the great importance of this duty in us, which may be remarked.

Our Savior requires us to carry a sense of our integrity and sincerity in the discharge of this duty along

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with us *in our addresses to God* in prayer. Hence he teaches and enjoins us to pray, or plead for the forgiveness of our debts to God, (that is, our sins or trespasses against him, which make us debtors to his law and justice,) even as we forgive them that so trespass or offend against us as to stand in need of our forgiveness. Matt. 6 : 12. Many are ready to devour such as are not satisfied that the words of that rule of prayer which he hath prescribed are to be precisely read or repeated every day. I wish they would as heedfully mind the prescription here given us for that frame of heart and spirit which ought to be in all our supplications; it might possibly abate their wrath in that and other things. But here is a rule for all prayer, as all acknowledge; as also of the things that are requisite to make it acceptable. This in particular is required, that before the Searcher of all hearts, and in our addresses to him in our greatest concerns, we profess our sincerity in the discharge of this duty, and put our obtaining of what we desire on that issue. This is a crown put upon the head of this duty which makes it very eminent, and evidences the great concern of the glory of God and our own souls therein.

Again we may observe that *no other duty* whatever is expressly placed in the same order or rank with this; which shows that it is singled out to be professed as a token and pledge of our sincerity in all other parts of our obedience to God. It is by Christ himself made the instance for the trial of our sincerity in our universal obedience, which gives no small honor to it. The apostle puts great weight on the fifth commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother, because it is the first commandment with promise." Ephes. 6 : 2. All the commandments indeed had a promise: Do this and live; life was promised to the observance of them all. But this is the first that had a peculiar promise annexed to

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it, and accompanying it. And it was such a promise as had a peculiar foundation, through God's ordinance, in the thing itself. It is, that the parents should prolong the lives of their children that were obedient. Exodus, 20 : 12. (Hebrew, They shall prolong thy days;) that is, by praying for their prosperity, blessing them in the name of God, and directing them in those ways of obedience whereby they might live and possess the land; and this promise is now translated from the covenant of Canaan into the covenant of grace: the blessing of parents going far towards interesting their children in the promise, and so prolonging their days unto eternity, though their days in this world should be of little continuance. And as the promise annexed to that command renders it singular, so also doth the especial instancing of this duty in our prayer: for though, as all the commandments had a promise, so we are to carry a testimony with us of our sincerity in universal obedience in our addresses to God; yet the singling out of this duty renders it exceedingly remarkable, and shows what a value God puts upon it, and how well he is pleased with it.

God requires this forgiveness in us, *on account of* the forgiveness we receive from him; which is to put the greatest obligation upon us that we are capable of, and to give the strongest and most powerful motive possible to its performance. See Ephes. 4 : 32.

This duty is more directly and expressly required in the New Testament than in the Old. Required then it was, but not so openly, so plainly, so expressly, as now. Zechariah, when he died, cried, "The Lord look on it, and require it;" but Stephen, dying in the same cause, said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Elijah called for fire from heaven; but our Savior reproves the least inclination in his disciples to imitate him. And the reason of this difference is, that forgive-

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ness in God is far more clearly exhibited, especially in the nature and cause of it, in the Gospel, which hath brought life and immortality to light, than it was under the law.

This forgiveness of others is made an express condition of our obtaining forgiveness from God. Matt. 6 : 14, 15. Our forgiving others will not procure forgiveness for ourselves; but our not forgiving others proves that we ourselves are not forgiven. All these things show what weight God himself lays on this duty.

2. This duty is such, that there is nothing more comely, useful, or honorable, than a due performance of it. To be morose, implacable, inexorable, revengeful, is one of the greatest degeneracies of human nature. To remember injuries, to retain a sense of wrongs, to watch for opportunities of revenge, to hate and be maliciously perverse, is to represent the image of the devil to the world in its proper colors; he is the great enemy and self-avenger. On the other hand, no grace, no duty, no ornament of the mind is in itself so lovely, so praiseworthy, or so useful to mankind, as are meekness and readiness to forgive. This is that principally which renders a man a good man, for whom one would even dare to die. And I am sorry to add that this grace or duty is recommended by its rarity. It is little found amongst the children of men.

There is no grace, virtue, or perfection in any man, but is an emanation from the Divine goodness and bounty, and so expressive of some excellence or perfection that exists in God in a way infinitely more excellent.

We are created in the image of God. Whatever was good or comely in us was a part of that image; especially the ornaments of our minds, the perfections of our souls. These things had in them a resemblance of, and a correspondence to some excellences in God. This being for the most part lost by sin, a shadow of

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it only remaining in the faculties of our souls, our recovery by grace is but an initial renovation of the image of God in us. Ephes. 4 : 22. It is the implanting upon our natures those graces which may render us again like unto him. And nothing is grace or virtue but that so answers to something in God. So then, whatever is in us of this kind, is in God absolutely, perfectly, in a manner infinitely more excellent.

Let us now put these things together. God requires of us forgiveness for those that offend us: forgiveness without limitation or bounds; this grace he bestows on his saints, sets a high price upon it, and manifests, in many ways, that he accounts it among the most excellent of our endowments, one of the most lovely and praiseworthy qualifications of any person. What then shall we now say? Is there forgiveness with him, or not? "He that made the eye, shall he not see? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear?" He that thus prescribes forgiveness to us, that bestows the grace of it upon us, is there not forgiveness with him? To deny it, is virtually to say, though we are good, yet God is not; though we are benign and bountiful, yet he is not. He that finds this grace wrought in him in any measure, and yet fears that he shall not find it in God, doth so far exalt himself above God; which is the natural effect of cursed unbelief.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE GREATNESS OF FORGIVENESS.—PREVAILING UNBELIEF.

The preceding arguments and demonstrations have, we hope, undeniably evinced the great truth that there is forgiveness with God, which is the life and soul of all our hope, religion, and worship. The end of all this discourse is to lay a firm foundation for faith to rest upon in its addresses to God for the forgiveness of sins, and to encourage all sorts of persons to this duty. This end remains now to be explained and pressed; but two things are further to be premised. And the first is, to propose some considerations about this forgiveness which may *encourage us to seek after it*, and to mix the testimonies given to it with faith, for our benefit. The other is to show how needful all this endeavor is, on account of great and prevailing unbelief. As to the first of these, then, we may consider,

I. The forgiveness that is with God is SUCH AS BECOMES HIM; such as is suitable to his greatness, goodness, and all other excellences: it is GREAT—such that therein he will be known to be God. What he says concerning some of the works of his providence, "Be still, and know that I am God," may be much more said concerning this great effect of his grace. It is not like that narrow, halving, and manacled forgiveness found amongst men. It is full, free, boundless, bottomless, absolute, such as becomes his nature and excellences. It is, in a word, forgiveness that is with God, and by the exercise of which he will be known to be God. Hence,

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1. God himself distinguishes his forgiveness from any thing that our thoughts and imaginations can reach, and that because *it is his, and like himself.* It is an object for faith alone, which can rest in that which it cannot comprehend. It is never safer than when it is, as it were, overwhelmed with infiniteness. But set mere rational thoughts, or the imaginations of our minds, at work about such things, and they fall inconceivably short of them. They can neither conceive of them aright, nor use them to their proper end and purpose. Were not forgiveness in God something beyond what men could imagine, no flesh could be saved. This he himself expresses, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isa. 55 : 7–9. They are, as is plain in the context, thoughts of forgiveness and ways of pardon of which he speaks. These our apprehensions come short of; we know little or nothing of the infinite largeness of his heart in this matter. The person that God speaks of, is, as the Hebrew expresses it, an impiously wicked man, or a man of deceit and perverse wickedness: he whose design and course is nothing but a lie, sin and iniquity; such a one as we should have little or no hope of, that we should scarcely think it worth our while to deal with, in reference to his conversion; one that we can scarcely find it in our hearts to pray for, but are ready to give up as profligate and desperate—but let him return unto the Lord, and even he shall obtain forgiveness. But how can this be? Is it possible there should be mercy for such a one? Yes! for the Lord will multi-

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ply to pardon, (Hebrew.) He hath forgiveness with him to outdo all the multiplied sins of any that return to him, and seek for it. But this is very hard, very difficult for us to apprehend. This is not the manner of men: we deal not thus with profligate offenders against us. True, saith God, "But your ways are not my ways:" I do not act in this matter like unto you, nor as you are accustomed to do. How then shall we apprehend it? how shall we conceive of it? You can never do it by your reason or imaginations: "For as the heavens are above the earth, so are my thoughts," in this matter, "above your thoughts." This is an expression to show the largest and most inconceivable distance. The creation will afford no more significant expression or representation of it. The heavens are inconceivably distant from the earth, and inconceivably glorious above it. So are the thoughts of God; they are not only distant from ours, but have a glory in them that we cannot rise up to.

For the most part, when we come to deal with God about forgiveness, we hang in every briar of disputing quarrelsome unbelief. This or that circumstance of aggravation, this or that unparalleled particular, bereave us of our confidence. Want of a due consideration of Him with whom we have to do, measuring with the line of our own imagination, bringing him down to our thoughts and our ways, is the cause of all our disquiet. Because we find it hard to forgive pence, we think he cannot forgive talents. But he hath provided to obviate such thoughts in us, "I will not execute the fierceness of my wrath, I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I AM GOD, AND NOT MAN." Our satisfaction in this matter is to be taken from his nature; were he a man, or as the sons of men, it were impossible that, upon such and so many provocations, he should turn away from the fierceness of his anger.

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But he is God: this gives an inconceivable boundlessness to the forgiveness that is with him, and exalts it above all our thoughts and ways.

2. God engages *his infinite excellences* to demonstrate the greatness and boundlessness of his forgiveness. He proposes them to our consideration, to convince us that we shall find pardon with him suitable and answerable to them. See Isa. 40 : 27–31. "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of his understanding: He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength: even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." The matter in question is, whether acceptance with God, which is only by forgiveness, is to be obtained or not: this sinful Jacob either despairs of, or at least desponds about. But, saith God, "My thoughts are not your thoughts" in this matter. And what course does he take to convince them of their mistake? What argument does he make use of to free them from their unbelief, and to rebuke their fears? Plainly, he calls them to the consideration of himself, both who and what he is with whom they had to do, that they might expect acceptance and forgiveness such as become him. Reminding them of his power, his immensity, his infinite wisdom, his unchangeableness, all the excellences and properties of his nature, he demands of them whether they have not just ground to expect forgiveness and grace above all their thoughts and apprehensions, be-

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cause corresponding with the infinite largeness of his heart, from whence it proceeds.

And Moses uses this plea for the forgiveness of Israel under a high provocation and a most severe threatening of their destruction. Numb. 14 : 17, 18. He pleads for pardon in such a manner as may answer the great and glorious properties of the nature of God, and which would manifest an infiniteness of power and all-sufficiency in him.

This, I say, is an encouragement in general to believers. We have, as I hope, upon unquestionable grounds evinced that there is forgiveness with God, which is the hinge on which the issue of our eternal condition turns. Now, this is like himself, such as becomes him; that answers the infinite perfections of his nature; that is exercised and given forth by him as God. We are apt to narrow and limit it by our unbelief, and to render it unbecoming of him. He no more dishonors God, who, being wholly under the power of the law, believes that there is no forgiveness with him, than he does, who, being convinced of the principles and grounds of it, and of the truth of the testimony given to it, yet, by narrowing and limiting it, renders it unworthy of Him whose excellences are all infinite, and whose ways on that account are incomprehensible.

If, then, we resolve to treat with God about forgiveness, let us do it as becomes his greatness, that is, indeed, as the wants of our souls require: let us not entangle our own spirits by limiting his grace The father of the child possessed with a devil, being in a great agony when he came to our Savior, cries out, "If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us." Mark, 9 : 22. He would fain be delivered, but the matter was so great that he questioned whether the Lord Christ had either compassion or power enough for his relief. And what did he obtain hereby? Nothing

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but the retarding of the cure of his child for a season: for our Savior holds him off until he had instructed him on this point: "If thou canst believe, all things are possible unto him that believeth." Mistake not, if thy child be not cured, it is not for want of power or pity in me, but of faith in thee. My power is such as renders all things possible.

So it is with many who would be made partakers of forgiveness: if it be possible, they would be pardoned, but they do not see it possible. Why, where is the defect? God hath no pardon for them, or such as they are; and so it may be they will finally come short of pardon. What, because it is not possible with God to pardon them? Not at all; but because they cannot, they will not believe that the forgiveness which is with him is such that it would answer all the wants of their souls. God is dishonored when he is limited by us in any thing, and most of all in his grace. This he calls a tempting of him, a provoking temptation, "They turned back and tempted God, they limited the Holy One of Israel." Psalm 78 : 41. This he could not bear with. If there be any pardon with God, it is such as becomes him to give: when he pardons, he will "abundantly pardon." Go with your limited, conditional pardons, with reserves and limitations to the sons of men; it may become them, it is like themselves: that of God is absolute and perfect, before which our sins are as a cloud before the rising sun. Hence he is said to do this work with his whole heart and his whole soul; "*charizesthai*," freely, bountifully, largely to indulge and forgive unto us our sins, and to cast them into the bottom of the sea, Micah, 7 : 19, into a bottomless ocean, an emblem of infinite mercy. Remember this, poor souls, when you come to God for forgiveness: all things are possible to them that believe

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II. This forgiveness is with God, not only so that we may apply ourselves to it if we will, for which he will not be offended with us, but so also that he hath PLACED HIS GREAT GLORY IN THE DECLARATION AND COMMUNICATION OF IT; nor can we honor him more than by coming to him to receive it from him. For the most part, we are as it were ready rather to steal forgiveness from God, than to receive from him as one that gives it freely and largely. We take it up and lay it down, as though we would be glad to have it, if God did not see us take it; for we are afraid he is not willing we should have it indeed. We would steal this fire from heaven, and have a share in God's treasures and riches almost without consent: at least we think that we have it from him with much difficulty; that he gives it with a kind of unwilling willingness, as we sometimes give alms; and that he loses as much by us as he gives out in pardon. We are apt to think that we are very willing to have forgiveness, but that God is unwilling to bestow it, and that because he seems to be a loser by it, and to forego the glory of inflicting punishment for our sins. This is the nature of unbelief.

But indeed things are quite otherwise. He hath, in this matter, through the Lord Christ, ordered all things, in his dealings with sinners, to the "praise of the glory of his grace." Eph. 1 : 6. His design in the whole mystery of the Gospel is to make his grace glorious, or to exalt pardoning mercy. The great fruit and product of his grace is forgiveness; the forgiveness of sinners. By this God will render himself glorious. For this cause he spared the world when sin first entered into it; for this cause did he provide a new covenant when the old was become unprofitable; for this cause did he send his Son into the world. We can then no way so eminently bring or ascribe glory to God, as by our receiving forgiveness from him; he being willing thereunto on account of its

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tendency to his own glory in that way which he hath peculiarly fixed on for its manifestation. Hence the apostle exhorts us to come "boldly to the throne of grace," Heb. 4 : 16; that is, with the confidence of faith, as he expounds boldness, chap. 10 : 19, 20. We come about a business wherewith he is well pleased; such as he delights in doing. "The Lord thy God, in the midst of thee, is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy. He will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." Zeph. 3 : 17. This is the way of God's pardoning; he does it in a rejoicing, triumphant manner, satisfying abundantly his own holy soul therein, and resting in his love. We have, then, abundant encouragement to draw nigh to the throne of grace, to be made partakers of what God is so willing to give us.

And to this end serves also the oath of God before insisted on, namely, to root out all the secret reserves of unbelief concerning God's willingness to give mercy, grace and pardon to sinners. See Heb. 6 : 17, 18. Therefore the tendency of our former arguments is not merely to prove that there is forgiveness with God which we may believe and not be mistaken, but that we ought to believe: it is our duty so to do. We think it our duty to pray, to hear the word, to give alms, to love the brethren, and to abstain from sin; and if we fail in any of these, we find the guilt of them reflected upon our conscience to our disquiet; but we scarcely think it our duty to believe the forgiveness of our sins. How few are there whose conscience is burdened with this as a sin, that they do not, as they ought, believe the forgiveness of their sins? And this is merely because men judge it not their duty so to do; for a non-performance of a duty so apprehended to be such, will reflect on the conscience a sense of the guilt of sin. But now, what can be required to make any thing a duty to us, that is wanting in this? For,

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1. The forgiveness with God is *manifested*, *revealed*, *declared*. This manifestation of it is what makes it the object of our faith. We believe things to be in God, not merely and formally because they are so, but because he hath manifested and revealed them so to be. 1 John, 1 : 2. What he so declares, it is our duty to believe, or we frustrate the end of his revelation.

2. We are expressly *commanded* to believe, and that upon the highest promises and under the greatest penalties. This command is that which makes believing formally a duty. Faith is a grace as it is freely wrought in us by the Holy Ghost, the root of all obedience and duties as it is radically fixed in the heart; but as it is commanded, it is "a duty;" and these commands, you know, are variously expressed, by invitations, exhortations, propositions, which all have in them the nature of commands, and which take up a great part of the books of the New Testament.

3. It is a duty, as we have showed, of the greatest concern to the glory of God; and,

4. Of the greatest importance to our souls, here and hereafter. These things were necessary to be added, to ground our ensuing exhortations on.

PREVAILING UNBELIEF OF FORGIVENESS.

We should now naturally proceed to the improvement of the truth all along aimed at; namely, to give exhortations and encouragements to believing. But I can take few steps in this work wherein, methinks, I do not hear some saying, "Surely all this is needless: who is there that does not believe all you are laboring to prove?" And so these pains are spent to little or no purpose. I shall, therefore, before I persuade any to it, endeavor to show that they do it not already. Many, I say, the most of men who live under the dispensation of the Gos

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pel, do wofully deceive their own souls in this matter. They do not believe what they profess themselves to believe, and what they think they believe. Men talk of fundamental errors: this is to me the most fundamental error that any can fall into, and the most pernicious. It is made up of these two parts: 1. They do not indeed believe forgiveness; 2. They suppose they do believe it, which keeps them from seeking after their only remedy. Both these mistakes lie at the foundation, and ruin the souls of those that live and die in them. I shall then, by a brief inquiry, put this matter to a trial. By some plain rules and principles may this important question, Whether we do indeed believe forgiveness, or not? be answered and decided. But before proceeding to this, I shall premise two observations.

Men, in this case, are very apt to deceive themselves. Self-love, vain hopes, love of pleasure, common false principles, sloth, unwillingness to self-condemnation, reputation with the world, and it may be in the church, all vigorously concur to men's self-deceivings in this matter. It is no easy thing for a soul to break through all these, and all self-reasonings that rise from them, to come to a clear judgment of its own acting in coming to God for forgiveness. Men also daily meet with a common presumption of this truth, and its being an easy relief against stings of conscience and disturbing thoughts about sin. Aiming, therefore, only at the removal of trouble, and finding that their present imagination of its removal gives present quiet, they never bring their persuasion to the trial.

Again, as men are prone to do thus, so they actually do; they deceive themselves, and know not that they do so. The last day will make this evident, if men will no sooner be convinced of their folly. The truth tells us "That many are called, and but few are chosen;" they are but few who do really believe forgiveness. When

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our Savior told his disciples that one of the twelve should betray him, though it were but one of twelve that was in danger, yet every one of the twelve made a particular inquiry about himself; and is it not incumbent on every one to be inquiring in what number he is likely to be found at the last day? Whilst men put this inquiry off from themselves, and think or say, "It may be the concern of others, it is not mine," they perish, and that without remedy. Remember what poor Jacob said when he had lost one child and was afraid of the loss of another, "If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." Gen. 43 : 14. As if he had said, If I lose my children I have no more to lose, they are my all: nothing worse could befall me in this world. Comfort, joy, yea, life and all, go with them. How much more may men say in this case, If we are deceived here, we are deceived; all is lost; hope, and life, and soul, all must perish, and that for ever. There is no help or relief for them who deceive themselves in this matter: they have found out a way to go quietly down into the pit.

Now these things are premised only that they may be incentives to self-examination in this matter, and so render the ensuing considerations useful: let us then address ourselves to them.

I. In general, *this is Gospel truth;* yea, the great, fundamental, and most important truth of the Gospel. It is the turning point of the two covenants, as God himself declares. Heb. 8 : 7–13. Now, a very cursory consideration of the ways of men will satisfy us as to this inquiry, whether they do indeed believe the Gospel, the covenant of grace, and the fundamental principles of it. Certainly their ignorance, darkness, blindness, their corrupt affections and worldly conversation, their earthly-mindedness and open disavowing of the Spirit, ways, and yoke of Christ, speak no such lan-

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guage. Shall we think that proud, worldly, self-seekers, haters of the people of God and his ways, despisers of the Spirit of grace and his work, believe the covenant of grace or remission of sins? God forbid we should entertain any thought of so great dishonor to the Gospel. Wherever that is received or believed, it produces other effects. Titus, 2 : 11, 12; Isaiah, 11 : 6–9. It teaches men to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts. It changes their hearts and ways. It is not such a barren, impotent, and fruitless thing as such an apprehension would represent it.

II. They that really believe forgiveness in God do thereby *obtain* forgiveness. Believing gives an interest in it; it brings it home to the soul. This is the inviolable law of the Gospel. Believing and forgiveness are inseparably conjoined. Among the evidences we may have of any one being interested in forgiveness, I shall only name one, *they prize and value it above all the world.* Let us inquire what esteem those have of forgiveness who do not so much as raise the question whether they believe it. Do they look upon it as their treasure, their pearl of price? Are they solicitous about it? Do they often look and examine whether it continues safe in their possession or not? Suppose a man have a precious jewel laid up in some place in his house; suppose it to be to him as the poor widow's two mites, all his substance or living; will he not often think of it? will he not frequently satisfy himself that it is safe? We may know that such a house, such fields or lands do not belong to a man, when he passes by them daily and takes no notice of them. Now, how do most men regard forgiveness? Are their minds continually filled with thoughts about it? Are they solicitous concerning their interest in it? Do they reckon, that whilst that is safe, all is safe with them? When it is, as it were, laid out of the way by sin and unbelief do they

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give themselves no rest until it be afresh discovered? Is this the frame of the most of men? The Lord knows it is not. They talk of forgiveness, but esteem it not, prize it not, make no particular inquiries after it. They put it to an ungrounded venture whether ever they be partakers of it or not; for a relief against some pangs of conscience it is called upon, or else scarcely thought of at all. Let not such flatter themselves that they have any acquaintance with the mystery of gospel-forgiveness.

III. Let it be inquired of those who pretend to this persuasion of forgiveness, *how they came by it*, that we may know whether it be of Him who calleth us, or not; that we may try whether they have broken through the difficulties in believing it, which we have manifested abundantly to lie in their way.

When Peter confessed our Savior to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, he told him that "flesh and blood had not revealed that unto him, but his Father who is in heaven." Matt. 16 : 17. It is so with those who indeed believe forgiveness in God : flesh and blood hath not revealed it to them. It has not been furthered by any thing within them or without them; but all lies in opposition to it. "This is the work of God, that we believe." John, 6 : 29. A great work, the greatest work that God requireth of us. It is not only a great thing in itself, (the grace of believing is a great thing,) but it is great in respect of its object, (or what we have to believe, or forgiveness itself.) The great honor of Abraham's faith lay in this, that deaths and difficulties lay in the way of it. Rom. 4 : 18–20. But what is a dead body, and a dead womb, compared with an accusing conscience, a killing law, and apprehensions of a God terrible as a consuming fire? all which oppose themselves to a soul called to believe forgiveness.

What now have the most of men, who are confident

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in the profession of this faith, to say to this? Let them speak clearly, and they must say that indeed they never found the least difficulty in this matter; they never doubted of it; they never questioned it, and know no reason why they should. It is a thing which they have so taken for granted, that it never cost them an hour's anxiety, prayer, or meditation about it. Have they had secret struggles in their hearts about it? No. Have they considered how the objections that lie against it may be removed? Not at all. But is it so indeed that this persuasion is thus produced in you, you know not how? Are the corrupt natures of men and the Gospel so suited, so complying? Is the new covenant grown so congenial to flesh and blood? Is the greatest secret that ever was revealed from the bosom of the Father become so familiar and easy to the wisdom of the flesh? Is that which was folly to the wise Greeks, and a stumbling-block to the wondering Jews, become, on a sudden, wisdom and a plain path to men of the same principles that were in them? The truth of the matter is, that such men have a general, useless, barren notion of pardon, which Satan, presumption, tradition, common report and the customary hearing of the word have furnished them; but as for that Gospel discovery of forgiveness of which we have been speaking, they are utterly ignorant of it, and unacquainted with it. To convince such poor creatures of the folly of their presumption, I would but desire them to go to some real believers who are or may be known to them: let them be asked whether they came so easily by their faith and apprehensions of forgiveness, or not? Alas! saith one, these twenty years have I been following after God, and yet I have not arrived to an abiding cheering persuasion of it. I know what it cost me, what trials, difficulties, temptations I wrestled with, and went through withal, before I ob-

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tained it, saith another. What I have attained to hath been of unspeakable mercy: and it is my daily prayer that I may be preserved in it by the exceeding greatness of the power of God; for I continually wrestle with storms that are ready to drive me from my anchor. A little of such discourse may be sufficient to convince poor, dark, carnal creatures, of the folly and vanity of their confidence.

IV. There are certain *means* whereby the revelation of this mystery is made to the souls of men. By these they obtain it, or never receive it. The mystery itself was a secret, hidden in the counsel of God from eternity; nor was there any way whereby it might be revealed but by the Son of God; and that is done in the Gospel. If, then, you say you know it, let us inquire how you came so to do, and by what means it hath been declared to you. Has this been done by the word of truth? Was it by the preaching of the word, or by reading it, or meditating upon it? Or has it insensibly gotten ground upon your heart or mind from the truth wherein you had been instructed? Or by what other ways or means have you come to that acquaintance with it whereof you boast? You can tell how you came by your wealth, your gold and silver; you know how you became learned, or obtained the knowledge of your trade, who taught you it, and how you came by it. Wonder not then if you are called to answer this question also, By what way or means came you to the knowledge of forgiveness, which you boast of? Was it by any of those before mentioned, or some other? If you cannot answer distinctly to these things, only you say that you have heard it, and believed it ever since you can remember; that those that went before you did so; that so they say with whom you converse; that you never met with any one that called it in question, nor heard of any, unless it were one or two

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despairing wretches; I say, if this is all you know as to the grounds of your confidence in forgiveness, it may be justly questioned whether you have any portion in this matter. If uncertain reports, general notions lie at the bottom of your persuasion, do not suppose that you have any communion with Christ therein.

V. Of those who profess to believe forgiveness, how few are there who indeed *know what it is.* They believe, they say; but, as the Samaritans, worship they know not what. With some a bold presumption, and crying peace, peace, goes for the belief of forgiveness. A general apprehension of impunity from God, and that, though they are sinners, yet they shall not be punished, passes with others at the same rate. Some think they shall prevail with God by their prayers and desires, to let them alone and not cast them into hell. One way or other, to escape the vengeance of hell, not to be punished in another world, is that which men fix their minds upon.

But is this that forgiveness which is revealed in the Gospel? The rise and spring of our forgiveness is in the heart and gracious nature of God, declared by his name. Have you inquired seriously into this? Have you stood at the shore of that infinite ocean of goodness and love? Has your soul found support and relief from that consideration? and has your heart leaped within you with the thoughts of it? Or, if you have never been affected in an especial manner herewith, have you bowed down your soul under the consideration of that sovereign act of God that is the next spring of forgiveness; that glorious acting of free grace, that when all might justly have perished, all having sinned and come short of his glory, God would yet have mercy on some? Have you given up yourself to this grace? Is this any part of what you believe? Suppose you are a stranger to this also, what communion with God have you had

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about it in the blood of Christ? We have showed how a way is made by his blood for the exercise of mercy, in consistency with the glory and honor of the justice of God and of his law; how pardon is procured and purchased thereby; with the mysterious reconciliation of love and law. What have you to say to these things? Have you seen pardon flowing from the heart of the Father through the blood of the Son? Have you looked upon it as the price of his life and the purchase of his blood? Or have you only general thoughts that Christ died for sinners, and that on one account or other forgiveness relates to him, while you are a stranger to the mystery of this great work? Forgiveness, as we have showed, is manifested, tendered, exhibited in the covenant of grace and promises of the Gospel; and the rule of their efficacy is, that they be mixed with faith, Heb. 4 : 2; but if you are a stranger to the things before mentioned, you are no less to this also. You know not, then, what forgiveness is, nor wherein it consists, nor whence it comes, nor how it is procured, nor by what means given to sinners. It is to no purpose for such persons to pretend that they believe that to which they are such utter strangers.

VI. Another inquiry into this subject regards *the state in which souls must be* before it be possible for them to believe forgiveness. If there be such a state, and it can be shown that very many of the pretenders to whom we refer, were never brought into it, it is then evident that they neither do nor can believe forgiveness, however they may delude their own souls.

It has been shown that the first discovery made of pardoning grace was to Adam, presently after the fall. What was then his condition? How was he prepared for the reception of this great mystery in its first discovery? He was convinced of sin; afraid of punishment, he lay trembling before God. Then was forgiveness

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revealed to him: so the Psalmist states it, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?" Psalm 130 : 3. He is full of thoughts of the desert of sin, and of inevitable and eternal ruin, in case God should deal with him according to the strictness of the law. In that state forgiveness with God is suggested to him by the Holy Ghost. We know how the Pharisees resisted our Savior in reference to this truth. "Are we," say they, "blind also?" No, saith he, "Ye say, we see, therefore your sin remaineth." John, 9 : 40, 41. It is to no purpose to talk of forgiveness to such persons as you are, you must of necessity abide in your sins: I come not to call such righteous persons as you are, but sinners to repentance; who not only are so, but are sensible of their being so, and of their undone condition: "The whole have no need of the physician, but the sick." Whilst you are seeming righteous and whole, it is to no end to tell you of forgiveness; you cannot understand it, nor receive it. It is impossible, then, that any one should truly believe forgiveness in God, unless he be truly convinced of sin in himself. If the fallow ground be not broken up, it is to no purpose to sow the seed of the Gospel. There is neither life, power, nor sweetness, in this truth, unless a door be opened for its entrance by conviction of sin.

Let us then, on this ground also, continue our inquiry of the ordinary boasters of their skill in this mystery. You believe there is forgiveness with God: yes; but have you been convinced of sin? yes; you know well enough that you are sinners. Answer then but once more to the nature of this conviction which you say you have: is it not made up of these two ingredients? 1. A general notion that you are sinners, as all men also are. 2. Particular troublesome reflections upon yourselves, when, on any eruption of sin, conscience accuses, rebukes, condemns. You will say, Yes,

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what would you require more? I answer, this is not true conviction; that is a work of the Spirit by the word: this you speak of, is a mere natural work, which you can no more avoid than you can cease to be men, and it gives no assistance in the receiving of forgiveness.

But it may be you will say you have proceeded farther. Let us then a little try whether your process has been according to the mind of God; and so, whether this invincible bar in your way be removed; for although every convinced person does not believe forgiveness, yet no one does who is not convinced. Have you then been made sensible of your condition by nature, what it is to be alienated from the life of God, and to be obnoxious to his wrath? Have you been convinced of the universal enmity of your heart to God, and what it is to be at enmity against God? Has the unspeakable multitude of the sins of your life been set in order by the law before you? And have you considered what it is for sinners, such sinners as you are, to have to deal with a righteous and a holy God? Hath the Holy Ghost wrought a serious recognition in your hearts of all these things, and caused them to abide with you? If you will answer truly, must you not say that indeed you have not been so exercised. You have heard of these things many times, but to say that you have gone through with this work, and have had experience of them, that you cannot do. Then, I say, you are strangers to forgiveness, because you are strangers to sin. But if you shall say that you have had thoughts to this purpose, and are persuaded that you have been thoroughly convinced of sin, I shall yet ask you one question more, What effects has your conviction produced in your hearts and lives? Have you been filled with perplexities and consternation of spirit thereupon? Have you had fears or terrors to wrestle with? It may be you will say, no; nor will I insist upon that inquiry;

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but this I ask you: Has it filled you with self-loathing and abhorrence, with self-condemnation and abasement? If it will do any thing, it will do this. If you come short here, it is justly to be feared that all your other pretences are of no value. Now, where there is no work of conviction, there is no faith of forgiveness, whatever is pretended. And how many vain boasters this sword will cut off, is evident.

VII. We have yet a greater evidence than all these: men *live in sin*, and therefore they do not believe forgiveness of sin. Faith purifies the heart. Acts, 15 : 9. Our souls are purified in obeying the truth, 1 Pet. 1 : 22; and the life is made fruitful by it. Faith produces good works, and makes itself perfect by them. James, 2 : 22. And the doctrine of forgiveness has a special influence unto all holiness: "The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, teacheth us to deny all unrighteousness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world," Titus, 2 : 11, 12; this is the grace whereof we speak. No man then can believe forgiveness of sin, without a detestation and relinquishment of it. The ground of this might be farther manifested; but all that own the Gospel must acknowledge this principle. True faith in the pardon of sin prevails with men not to live longer in sin.

But how is it with the greatest number of those who pretend to receive this truth? Are their hearts purified by it? Are their consciences purged? Are their lives changed? Do they deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts? Have they found forgiveness effectual to these purposes? Whence is it, then, that there is such a bleating and bellowing to the contrary amongst them? Some are drunkards, some are swearers, some are unclean persons, some are liars, some are worldly, some are haters of all the ways of Christ, and all his interests upon the earth; proud, covetous, boasters, self-seekers,

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envious, wrathful, backbiters, malicious praters, slanderers, and the like: and shall we think that such as these believe forgiveness of sin? God forbid. Again, some are ignorant, blind, utterly unacquainted with the mystery of the Gospel, nor do at all make it their business to inquire into it. Either they hear it not at all, or negligently, slothfully, from mere custom, and to no purpose. Let not such persons deceive their own souls: to live in sin, and yet believe the forgiveness of sin, is utterly impossible. Christ will not be a minister of sin, nor give his Gospel to be a doctrine of licentiousness; nor shall you be forgiven, that you may be delivered to do more abominations. God forbid.

If any shall say that they thank God they are no such publicans as those mentioned; they are no drunkards, no swearers, no unclean persons, or the like; so that they are not concerned in this consideration; their lives and their duties give another account of them. Then yet consider further, that the Pharisees were all that you say of yourselves; and yet the greatest despisers of forgiveness that ever were in the world; they hated the light, because their deeds were evil. As for the duties you mention, what, I pray, is the root and spring of them? Do they spring from this faith of forgiveness you boast of? May it not be feared that it is utterly otherwise? You do not perform them because you love the Gospel, but because you fear the law. If the truth were known, I fear it would appear that you get nothing by your believing of pardon but an encouragement to sin. Your goodness, such as it is, springs from another root. It may be also that you ward yourselves by it against the strokes of conscience or the guilt of particular sins; this is as bad as the other. You may as well be encouraged to sin, as to be so encouraged under sin, as to be kept from humiliation for it. None under heaven are more remote from the belief of grace and par-

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don than such persons: all their righteousness is from the law, and their sin in a great measure from the Gospel.

VIII. They that truly believe forgiveness, believe it *for the ends and purposes* for which it is revealed of God. If God reveals any thing for one end and purpose, and men use it quite to another, they do not receive the word of God, nor believe the thing revealed; but delude their own souls.

Let us then weigh to what ends and purposes this forgiveness was first revealed by God; for which also its manifestation is still continued in the Gospel. We have showed who it was to whom this revelation was first made, and what condition he was in when it was so made to him. A lost, wretched creature, without hope or help; how he should come to obtain acceptance with God he knew not. God reveals forgiveness to him by Christ to be his all. The intention of God in it was, that a sinner's all should be of grace. Rom. 11 : 6. If any thing be added to it for the same end and purpose, then grace is no more grace. Again, God intended it as a new foundation of obedience, of love and thankfulness. That men should love because forgiven, and be holy because pardoned, as I have showed before, that it might be the righteousness of a sinner, and a spring of new obedience in him, all to the praise of grace, were God's ends in its revelation.

Our inquiry then is, whether men receive this revelation and use it for these purposes, and these only. I might evince the contrary, by passing through the general abuses of the doctrine of grace, which are mentioned in Scripture, and common in the world; but it will not be needful. Instead of believing, most men seem to put a studied despite on the Gospel. They either proclaim it to be an unholy way, by turning its grace into lasciviousness, or a weak and insufficient way, by striving

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to twist it in with their own righteousness; both which are an abomination to the Lord.

From these, and other considerations which might be added, it is evident that our word is not in vain, nor the exhortation which is to be built upon it. It appears that, notwithstanding the great pretences in the world, there are but few who seriously receive this fundamental truth of the Gospel, namely, that there is forgiveness with God. Poor creatures! they sport themselves with their own deceivings, and perish in their own delusions.

CHAPTER XII.

EXHORTATION TO THE BELIEF OF FORGIVENESS.

We now proceed to the direct uses and practical bearings of the great truth that there is forgiveness with God. The persons concerned in this truth are all sinners whatever: no sort of sinners are unconcerned in it, none are excluded from it: and we include all under two heads. 1. Such as never yet sincerely closed with the promises of grace, and have never received forgiveness from God in believing. These we have already endeavored to undeceive, and to discover those false presumptions whereby they are apt to ruin and destroy their own souls: these we would now guide into safe and pleasant paths, wherein they may find assured rest and peace. 2. Others there are who have received it, but being again entangled by sin, or clouded by darkness and temptations, or weakened by unbelief, know not how to improve it to their peace and comfort. This is the condition of the soul represented in this

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psalm; and which we shall therefore apply ourselves to in a special manner, in its proper place.

Our exhortation, then, is to both. To the first, that they would receive it, that they may have life; to the other, that they would improve it, that they may have peace. To the former, that they would not neglect so great a salvation as is tendered to them; to the latter, that they would stir up the grace of God that is in them, to mix with the grace of God that is declared to them.

I begin with the first class, those who are yet utter strangers from the covenant of grace; who never yet, upon saving grounds, believed this forgiveness; who never have yet once tasted of Gospel pardon. Poor sinners! this word is to you.

Be it that you have heard or read the same instructions before, or others to the same purpose, it is your concern to hear them again. God would have it so; the testimony of Jesus Christ is thus to be accomplished. This counsel of God we must declare, that we may be free "from the blood of all men," Acts, 20:26, 27, and that not once or twice, but in preaching the word we must "be instant in season, out of season, reproving, rebuking, exhorting, with all long-suffering and doctrine." 2 Tim. 4:2. And wo to you, when God leaves thus speaking to you; when he refuses to exhort you any more, wo unto you. This is God's departure from any person or people, when he will deal with them no more about forgiveness: "Wo unto them when I depart from them." Hos. 9:12. O that God would give such persons seeing eyes and hearing ears, that the word of grace may never more be spoken to them in vain. Now, in our exhortation to such persons, we shall proceed in order according as the importance and the nature of the subject require. Consider, therefore,

I. That, notwithstanding all your sins, all the evil

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that your own hearts know you to be guilty of, and that hidden mass of sin which is in you, which you are not able to discover; notwithstanding that charge that lies upon you from your own conscience, and that dreadful sentence and curse of the law which you are obnoxious to; notwithstanding all the just grounds you have to apprehend that God is your enemy, and will be so to eternity; yet TERMS OF PEACE AND RECONCILIATION ARE PROVIDED AND PROPOSED BETWEEN HIM AND YOUR SOUL. This, in the first place, is clearly declared in the psalm on which our discourse is founded. Whatever else it informs us of, this it positively asserts, namely, that there is a way whereby sinners may come to be accepted with God: for there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared. And we hope that we have not confirmed it by so many evidences in vain. Now, that you may see how great a privilege this is, and how deeply you are concerned in it, consider,

1. That this *belongs to you in an especial manner;* it is your peculiar advantage.

It is not so with the angels that sinned. There were never any terms of peace or reconciliation proposed to them, nor ever shall be to eternity. There is no way of escape provided for them. Having once sinned as you have done a thousand times, God spared them not, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment. 2 Pet. 2:4.

It is not so with them that have died in their sins. Ah! how would many souls, who are departed, it may be not an hour since, out of this world, rejoice for an interest in this privilege, the hearing of terms of peace once more between God and them; but their time is past, their house is left unto them desolate. As the tree falleth, so it must lie: "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment." Heb. 9:27.

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After death there are no terms of peace; nothing but judgment. The living, the living, he alone is capable of this advantage.

It is not so with those to whom the Gospel is not preached. God suffers them to walk in their own ways, and calls them not thus to repentance. The terms of reconciliation, which some fancy to be offered in the shining of the sun and falling of the rain, never brought souls to peace with God. Life and immortality are brought to light only by the Gospel. This is your privilege who yet live, and yet have the word sounding in your ears.

It is not thus with those who have sinned against the Holy Ghost, though yet alive, and living where the word of forgiveness is preached. Blasphemy against him, saith Christ, shall not be forgiven. Matt. 12 : 31. There is no forgiveness for such sinners: "Their sin is unto death." 1 John, 5 : 16. And what numbers may be in this condition, God knows!

This word, then, is unto you: these terms of peace are proposed to you. This is that which, in an especial manner, you are to apply yourself unto; and wo to you if you shall be found to have neglected it at the last day. Therefore consider,

2. *By whom* these terms are proposed to you, and by whom they were procured for you. By whom are they *proposed*? Who shall undertake to be an umpire in the controversy between God and sinners? No creature, doubtless, is either meet or worthy to interpose in this matter. "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?" Wherefore it is God himself who proposes these terms; and not only proposes them, but invites, exhorts, and persuades you to accept of them. This the whole Scripture testifies to. It is fully expressed, 2 Cor. 5 : 18–20. He hath provided them, he hath proposed them, and only makes use of

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men, of ministers, to act in his name. And excuse us if we are a little earnest with you in this matter. Alas! our utmost to which, by zeal for his glory or compassion to your souls, we can raise our thoughts, comes infinitely short of his own pressing earnestness. See Isa. 55 : 1–4. Oh infinite condescension! Oh blessed grace! Who is this that thus addresses you? It is He against whom you have sinned, of whom you are justly afraid; he whose laws you have broken, and whose name you have dishonored; he who needs not you, nor your love, nor your friendship, nor your salvation. It is he who proposes to you these terms of reconciliation and peace. Consider the exhortation of the apostle, "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh from heaven." Heb. 12 : 25. Wo be unto your soul, and that for ever, if you should refuse him!

3. By whom were these terms *procured* for you? and by what means? Do not think that this matter was brought about by chance, or by an ordinary undertaking. Remember that the proposal made to you this day cost no less than the price of the blood of the Son of God. It is the fruit of the travail of his soul. For this he prayed, he wept, he suffered, he died. And shall it now be neglected or despised by you? Will you yet account the covenant to be a common thing? Will you exclude yourselves from all benefits of the purpose of those terms, and only leave your souls to answer for the contempt of the price whereby they were purchased?

4. Consider that you are *sinners*, great sinners, cursed sinners; some of you, it may be, worse than innumerable of your fellow-sinners were, who are now in hell. God might long since have cast you off everlastingly from all expectation of mercy, and have caused all your hopes to perish; or he might have left you alive, and yet have refused any longer to offer you terms of mercy. He could have caused your sun to go down at

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noon-day, and have given you darkness instead of vision. He could respite your lives for a season, and yet swear in his wrath that you should never enter into his rest. It is now otherwise: how long it may be so, neither you nor I know any thing at all. God only knows what will be your time, what your continuance. We are to warn you whilst it is called to-day. And this is that for the present which I have to offer to you: God declares that there is forgiveness with him; that your condition is not desperate nor helpless. There are yet terms of peace proposed to you. Methinks it cannot but seem strange that poor sinners should not at the least stir up themselves to inquire after them. When a poor man of old, had sold himself and his children to be servants, and parted with the land of his inheritance unto another, because of his poverty; with what heart, do you think, did he hear the sound of the trumpet, when it began to proclaim the year of jubilee, wherein he and all his were to go out at liberty, and to return to his possession and inheritance? And shall not poor servants of sin, slaves to Satan, that have forfeited all their inheritance in this world and that which is to come, attend to a proclamation of the year of rest, of the acceptable year of the Lord? And this is done in the tender of terms of peace with God. Do not put it off; this thing belongs to you; the great concern of your souls lies in it. It is a great matter; for, consider,

5. That when the angels came to bring the news of the birth of our Lord Jesus they say, We bring *good tidings of great joy* to the whole people. Luke, 2: 10. What are these joyful tidings? What was the matter of this report? Why, "This day is born a Savior, Christ the Lord." ver. 11. It is only this; a Savior is born: a way of escape is provided; and further they do not proceed. Yet this, they say, is a matter of great joy, as it was indeed. It is to every burdened, convinced

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sinner a matter of unspeakable joy and rejoicing. Oh, blessed words! "a Savior is born." This gives life to a sinner, and opens a door of hope in the valley of Achor, the first rescue of a sin-distressed soul. It was all that the saints for many ages had to live upon; and that not in the enjoyment, but only the expectation. They lived on that word, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head;" that is, a way of deliverance is provided for sinners. This with all diligence they inquired into, 1 Pet. 1 : 10–12, and improved it to their eternal advantage. As of old, when Jacob saw the wagons that his son Joseph had sent to bring him to him, it is said his spirit revived; so did they upon their obscure discovery of a way of forgiveness. They looked upon the promise of it as that which God had sent to bring them to him; and they saw the day of the coming of Christ in it, and rejoiced. How much more have sinners now reason so to do, when the substance of the promise is exhibited, and the news of his coming proclaimed to them.

If any one were justly condemned to a cruel and shameful death, and lay trembling in expectation of the execution, and a man designed for that purpose should come to him and tell him that there were terms propounded on which his life might be spared, only he came away, like Ahimaaz, before he heard the particulars; would it not be reviving to him? Would he not cry out, Pray inquire what they are, for there is nothing so difficult that I will not undergo it to free myself from this miserable condition? Would it not change the whole frame of the spirit of such a man, and as it were put new life into him? And if, instead of this, he should be froward, stubborn, and obstinate, take no notice of the messenger, or say, Let the judge keep his terms to himself, without inquiring what they are; would not such a person be deemed to perish deserved-

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ly? Doth he not bring a double destruction upon himself; first, of deserving death by his crimes, and then by refusing the good way of delivery tendered to him? I confess it often occurs that men come to inquire after these terms of peace, which, when they are revealed they like them not, but, with the young man in the Gospel, go away sorrowful. The cursed wickedness and misery of such a condition shall be spoken to afterwards. At present I speak to those who never yet attended in sincerity to these terms, nor seriously inquired after them. Think what you please of your condition; choose whether you will think of it or not; pass your time regardless of your present and future state; yet indeed you lie under the sentence of a bitter, shameful and everlasting death. You have made light of it in the midst of all your jollity, ever since you came into this world; but you are in the hand of Him who can, in the twinkling of an eye, destroy both soul and body in hell-fire. In this your condition, men are sent on purpose to let you know that there are terms of peace, that there is yet a way of escape for you; and that you may not fail of salvation, they tell you that God, who cannot lie, hath commanded them to tell you so. If you question the truth of what they say, they are ready to produce their warrant under God's own hand and seal; here then is no room for excuses. Certainly, if you have any care of your eternal state, if you have any drop of tender blood running in your veins towards your own souls, if you have any rational considerations dwelling in your minds, if all be not defaced and obliterated through the power of lust and love of sin, you cannot but consider yourselves unspeakably concerned in this proposal. But now, if you give up yourselves to the power of unbelief, the will of Satan, the love of your lusts, and this present world, so as to take no notice of this message from God, nor

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once seriously to inquire after the nature and importance of the terms proposed; can you escape? Shall you be delivered? Will your latter end be peace? The Lord knows it will be otherwise with you, and that to eternity.

So the apostle assures us, "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." 2 Cor. 4: 3, 4. If you receive not this word, if it be hid from you, it is from the power and efficacy of Satan upon your minds. And what will be the end? Perish you must, and that for ever.

Remember the parable of our Savior, "What king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand; or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassage, and desireth conditions of peace." Luke, 14: 31, 32. He teaches in this parable the necessity that lies on us of seeking peace with God, whom we have provoked, and justly made to be our enemy; as also our utter impotency to resist and withstand him when he shall come forth in a way of judgment and vengeance against us. But here lies a difference such as is allowed in all similitudes: amongst men at variance, it is not he who is the stronger and secure of success that sends to the weaker, whom he hath in his power, to accept of terms of peace; but God, who is infinitely powerful, justly provoked, and able to destroy poor sinners in a moment, when now he is not very far off, but at the very door, sends himself an embassage with conditions of peace. And shall he be refused by you? Will you yet neglect his offers? How great then will be your destruction!

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Hear then once more, poor sin-hardened, senseless souls, "ye stout-hearted and far from righteousness." Is it nothing to you that the great and holy God, whom you have provoked all your days, and whom you yet continue to provoke, who hath not the least need of you or your salvation, who can, when he pleases, eternally glorify himself in your destruction, should of his own accord send to let you know that he is willing to be at peace with you on the terms he hath proposed? The enmity began on your part, the danger is on your part only; and he might justly expect that the message for peace should begin on your part also: but he begins with you, and shall he be rejected? The prophet well expresses this, "Thus saith the Lord God, the holy One of Israel, In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not." Isa. 30: 15. The love and condescension in these words, on the one hand on the part of God, and the folly and ingratitude mentioned in them on the other hand, are inexpressible. They are fearful words: "But you would not." Remember this against another day. As our Savior says in like manner to the Jews, "Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life." Whatever is pretended, it is will and stubbornness that lie at the bottom of this refusal.

Wherefore, that either you may obtain advantage by it, or that the way of the Lord may be prepared for the glorifying of himself in you, I shall leave this message before all them that read or hear it, as the testimony which God requires to be given unto his grace. There are terms of peace with God provided for you, and tendered to you; it is yet called to-day, "harden not your hearts," like those of old, who could not enter into the rest of God by reason of unbelief. Heb. 3: 19. Some, it may be, are old in sin, and unacquainted with God; some, it may be, have been great and scandalous

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sinners; and some, it may be, have reason to apprehend themselves near the grave and hell; some of you, it may be, have your consciences disquieted and galled; and it may be, some are under outward troubles and perplexities that cause you a little to look about you; and some of you, it may be, are in the madness of your natural strength and lusts; your breasts are full of milk, and your bones of marrow, and your hearts of sin, pride and contempt of the ways of God: all is one; this word is unto you all; and I shall only remind you, "that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." You hear the voice or read the words of a poor worm, but the message is the message, and the word is the word of Him who shaketh heaven and earth. Consider well, then, what you have to do, and what answer you will return to Him who will not be mocked.

But you will say, Why is this matter urged with so much earnestness? We have heard the same words a hundred times over. The last Lord's day, such a one or such a one preached to the same purpose; and why need it be insisted on again with so much importunity?

And is it so indeed, that you have thus frequently been warned, and yet continue in a state of irreconciliation? My heart is pained for you, to think of your woful and almost remediless condition. If he that, "being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall perish suddenly, and that without remedy," Prov. 29: 1, how much more will he, who being often invited to peace with God, yet hardeneth his heart and refuseth to hear! Methinks I hear his voice concerning you, "Those, mine enemies, they shall not taste of the supper that I have prepared." Be it, then, that our message is a common one to you, and you set no value upon it; then take your way and course in sin; stumble, fall, and perish—it is not so slight a matter to poor convinced sinners, that tremble at the word of God; these will prize

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it, and improve it. We shall follow, then, that counsel, "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine to those that be of a heavy heart." Prov. 31 : 6. We shall tender this new wine of the Gospel to poor sad-hearted, conscience-distressed sinners, sinners that are ready to perish; to them it will be pleasant, they will "drink of it, and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more." It shall take away all their sorrow and sadness; when you shall be drunk with the fruit of your lusts, and lie down, and not rise again.

And now, if any begin to say in their hearts that they would willingly treat with God; "O that the day were come wherein we might approach unto him! Let him speak what he pleaseth, and propose what terms he pleaseth, we are ready to hear." Then consider,

II. That the terms provided for you, and proposed to you, are EQUAL, HOLY, RIGHTEOUS, YEA, PLEASANT AND EASY. They are not such as a cursed guilty sinner might justly expect, but such as are meet for an infinitely good and gracious God to propose; not suited to the wisdom of man, but full of the wisdom of God. 1 Cor. 2 : 6, 7. The poor convinced wretch, thinking of dealing with God, Micah, 6 : 6, 7, rolls in his mind what terms he is likely to meet with; and fixes on the most dreadful and difficult terms that can be imagined. If, saith he, any thing be done with this great and most high God, it must be by rivers, thousands and ten thousands, children, first-born; whatever is dreadful and terrible to nature, whatever it is impossible for me to perform, that is it which he looks for. But the matter is quite otherwise; the terms are wholly of another nature; it is a way of mere mercy, a way of free forgiveness. The apostle lays it down, Rom. 3 : 23–25; it is a way of propitiation, of pardon, of forgiveness in the blood of Christ; the terms are the acceptance of the forgiveness that we

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have described. Who would not think now, that the whole world would fly to him to be made partakers of these terms, willingly accepting of them? But it proves for the most part quite otherwise. Men like not this way, of all others. It had been something, says Naaman, if the prophet had come and done so and so; but this, "Go, wash and be clean," I do not like it, I am but deluded. Men think that had it been some great thing that was required of them that they might be saved, they would with all speed address themselves to it; but to come to God by Christ, to be freely forgiven, they like it not. Some rigid, austere penances, some compensatory obedience, some satisfactory mortification, or purgatory, had been a better way: this of mere pardon, in and by the cross, is but folly. 1 Cor. 1 : 18–20. I had rather, saith the Jew, have it as it were by the works of the law, Rom. 9 : 32, and chap. 10 : 3. This way of grace and forgiveness I like not. So say others also: so practise others every day; either this way is wholly rejected, or it is mended by some additions; which, with God, *is the same as the rejection of it.*

Here multitudes of souls deceive themselves and perish. I know not whether it be more difficult to persuade an unconvinced person to think of any terms, or a convinced person to accept of these. Let men say what they will and pretend what they please, yet practically they like not this way of forgiveness. I shall therefore offer some considerations tending to further your souls in the acceptance of the terms proposed.

1. This is the way; these are terms of *God's own choosing;* he found out this way, he established it himself. He did it when all was lost and undone; he did it not upon our desire, request, or proposal, but merely of his own accord; and why should we contend with him about it? If God will have us saved in a way of mere mercy and forgiveness; if his wisdom and sove-

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reignty be in it, shall we oppose him and say we like it not? Yet this is the language of unbelief. Rom. 10: 3, 4. Many poor creatures have contended with God, until at length, being overpowered as it were by the Spirit, they have said, If it must be so, and God will save us by mercy and grace, let it be so, we yield ourselves to his will; and yet throughout they dreamed of nothing but that their own unworthiness merely kept them from closing with the promise of the Gospel.

Thus Satan deceived our first parents, and deprived them of their interest in the covenant of works. The terms of it, saith he, as apprehended by you, are unequal. "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil ye shall not eat, lest ye die;" come, "you shall not die, for God doth know, in the day you eat thereof your eyes shall be opened." As if he had said, there is no proportion between the disobedience and the threatening: the issue cannot be such as is feared. And by these means he ruined them. Thus also he proceeds to deprive souls of their interest in the covenant of grace, to which they are invited. The terms of it, he says, are unequal, how can any man believe them? There is no proportion between the obedience and the promise. To have pardon, forgiveness, life, and a blessed eternity, on believing, who can rest in it? And here lies a conspiracy between Satan and unbelief, against the wisdom, goodness, love, grace, and sovereignty of God.

The poison of this deceit lies in representing that neither the righteousness nor the mercy of God is infinite, as indeed they are. The apostle, to remove this unbelief, calls us to the pleasure of God: "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching," 1 Cor. 1: 21, that is by the Gospel preached, which they esteemed foolishness, to save believers. He suffered men, indeed, to make trial of other ways; and when their insufficiency

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for the ends men proposed to themselves was manifested, it pleased him to reveal his way. And what are we, that we should contend about it with him? God's rejection of the way of personal righteousness, and choosing the way of grace and forgiveness, he reveals, Jer. 31:31–34. "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah; not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers," (in which administration of the covenant, as far as it had respect to typical mercies, much depended on their personal obedience,) "but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my law in their hearts, and will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more." Let, then, this way stand, and the way of man's wisdom and self-righteousness perish for ever.

2. This is the way that, above all others, tends directly and immediately to *the glory of God*. God has ordered all things in this way of forgiveness, so that "no flesh should glory in his presence," but that "he that glorieth, should glory in the Lord." 1 Cor. 1:29, 31. "Where then is boasting? It is excluded; by what law? By the law of works? nay, but by the law of faith." Rom. 3:27. It might be easily manifested that God hath so laid the design of saving sinners by forgiveness, according to the law of faith, that it is utterly impossible that any soul should, on any account whatever, have the least ground of glorying in itself, either absolutely or in comparison with them that perish. "If Abraham," saith the apostle, "were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God." Chap. 4:2. The obedience of works would have been so infinitely disproportionate to the reward, which was God himself, that there could have been no glorying before God; yet, in comparison with others

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who yielded not the obedience required, he would have had whereof to glory; but now this also is cut off by the way of forgiveness, and no pretence is left for any to claim the least share in the glory of it but God alone. And herein lies the excellency of faith, that it gives glory to God, Rom. 4:20, the denial of which, under various pretences, is the fruit of proud unbelief. And this God will bring all unto, or they shall perish; namely, that shame be ours, and the whole glory of our salvation be his alone. So he expresses his design, Isa. 45:22–25; verse 22, he proposes himself as the only relief for sinners: "Look unto me," saith he, "and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." But what if men take some other course, and look to themselves, and so decline this way of mere mercy and grace? Why saith he, verse 23, "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear." I have sworn that you shall either do so, or answer for your disobedience at the day of judgment. And how do the saints reply to this? verse 24, 25. "Surely shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." They bring their hearts to accept of all righteousness from him, and to give all glory to him.

God at first placed man in a blessed state, in which he might have wrought out his own eternal happiness with a great reputation of glory to himself. But "man being in this honor," saith the Psalmist, "abode not." God now fixes on another way, wherein all the glory shall be his own, as the apostle at large sets it forth. Rom. 3:23–26. Now, neither the way from which Adam fell, nor that wherein some of the angels continued, which were substantially the same, is to be compared with this of forgiveness, as to its bringing glory to

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God. I hate curiosity and conjecture in the things of God; yet I think I may boldly say, that, on account of the interposition of the blood of Christ, there comes more glory to God by saving one sinner in this way of forgiveness, than in giving the reward of blessedness to all the angels in heaven; so seems it to appear from that solemn representation we have of the ascription of glory to God by the whole creation, Rev. 5 : 9–13. All centres in forgiveness by the blood of the Lamb.

I insist the more on this, because it lies so directly against that cursed principle of unbelief which reigns in the hearts of the most, and often disquiets the best. That a poor ungodly sinner, going to God with the guilt of all his sins upon him, to receive forgiveness at his hand, doth bring more glory to him than the obedience of an angel, men are not over-ready to think, nor can be prepared for it but by forgiveness itself. And the nature of that unbelief which worketh in convinced sinners, lies in a refusal to give to God the whole glory of salvation. There are many hurtful controversies in religion that are managed in the world with great noise and clamor; but this is the greatest and most pernicious of them all, and it is for the most part silently transacted in the souls of men, although under various forms and pretences. It hath also broken forth in writings and disputations, that is, whether God or man shall have the glory of salvation, or whether it shall be wholly ascribed to God, or man also on one account or other may come in for a share. Now if this be the condition with any of you, that you will rather perish than God should have the glory, what can we say but, Go, wretched souls, perish for ever, without the least compassion from God, or any that love him, angels or men.

If you shall say, for your part, you are contented with this course, let God have the glory, so you may

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be forgiven and saved; there is yet just cause to suspect lest this be a selfish contempt of God. It is a great thing to give glory to God by truly believing. Such slight returns seem not to have the least relation to it. Take heed that instead of believing, you be not found mockers, and so your bands be made strong.

But a poor convinced sinner may here find encouragement. Thou wouldst willingly come to acceptance with God, and so attain salvation. "Oh, my soul longeth for it!" Wouldst thou willingly take that course for obtaining those ends which will bring most glory to God? "Surely it is meet, and most equal, that I should do so." What now if one should come and tell thee from the Lord, of a way whereby thou, poor, sinful, self-condemned creature, mightest bring as much glory unto God as any angel in heaven is able to do? "Oh! if I might bring the least glory unto God, I should rejoice in it." Behold, then, the way which himself hath fixed on for the exaltation of his glory, even that thou shouldst come to him, merely on account of grace in the blood of Christ, for pardon and forgiveness; and the Lord strengthen thee to give up thyself thereunto.

3. Consider, that if this way of salvation be refused, *there is no other way* for you. We do not propose this way of forgiveness as the best and most pleasant, but as the only way. There is no other name given but that of Christ; no other way but this of forgiveness. Here lies your choice; take this path, or perish for ever. It is a shame, indeed, to our cursed nature, that there should be any need to use this argument, that we will neither submit to God's sovereignty nor delight in his glory; but seeing it must be used, let it be so. I intend neither to flatter men nor to frighten them, but to tell them the truth as it is. If you continue in your present state; if you rest on what you do, or what you hope to do; if you support yourself with general hopes of mercy, mixed with

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your own endeavors and obedience—if you come not up to a thorough Gospel-closing with this way of God—if you make it not your all, giving glory to God therein, perish you will and must, and that to eternity. There remains no more sacrifice for your sins, nor way of escape for your soul. You have then not only the excellency of this way to invite you, but the absolute, indispensable necessity of this way to constrain you. And now let me add that I am glad this word is spoken unto you: you and I must one day give account for this discourse, which, if neglected, will prove a sore testimony against you: it will not fare with you as with other men who have not heard the joyful sound. All these words that shall be found consonant to the Gospel, if they are not turned to grace in your heart here, will turn into torment to your soul hereafter. Choose no other way, it will be in vain for you; it will not profit you; and take heed lest you suppose you embrace this way, when indeed you do not.

4. This way is *free and open to sinners.* He that fled to the city of refuge might well have many perplexed thoughts whether he should find the gates of it opened to him or not, and whether the avenger of blood might not overtake and slay him whilst he was calling for entrance. Or, if the gates were always open, yet some crimes excluded men. Numb. 35 : 24. It is not so here. Acts, 13 : 38, 39.

This is the voice of God, even the Father: Come, saith he, to the marriage, for all things are prepared, no fear of want of entertainment. Matt. 22 : 4. Whence the preachers of the Gospel are said, in his stead, to beseech men to be reconciled, 2 Cor. 5 : 20. And it is the voice of the Son: Whosoever cometh to God by me, I will in no wise cast out, John, 6 : 37. And this is the voice of the Spirit, and of the church, and of all believers, Rev. 22 : 17, "The Spirit and the bride say come; and

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let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." All centre in this, that sinners may come freely to the grace of the Gospel. And it is the voice of all the saints in heaven and earth who have been made partakers of forgiveness; they all testify that they received it freely.

Some indeed endeavor to abuse this concurrent testimony of God and man. What is spoken of the freedom of the grace of God they would wrest to the power of the will of man. But the riches and freedom of God's mercy do not in the least interfere with the efficacy of his grace. Though he proclaim pardon in the blood of Christ indefinitely, according to the fullness and excellency of it, yet he giveth out his quickening grace, to enable men to receive it, as he pleaseth; for he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy: but this lies in the thing itself; the way is open and prepared; and it is not because men cannot enter, but because they will not, that they do not enter. As our Savior tells the Pharisees, "Ye therefore hear not God's word, because ye are not of God." John, 8 : 47. So he saith, "Ye will not come to me that ye may have life." John, 5 : 40. In the neglect and inadvertency of the most excusable, there is a positive act of their will put forth in refusing Christ, and grace by him; and this is done by men under the preaching of the Gospel every day. There is nothing that, at the last day, will tend more immediately to the advancement of the glory of God, in the inexcusableness of those who obey not the Gospel, than this, that terms of peace, in the blessed way of forgiveness, were freely tendered to them. Some that read or hear this word may perhaps have lived long under the dispensation of the word of grace, and yet, it may be, have never once seriously considered this way of coming to God by forgiveness through the blood of Christ; but

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they think, that going to heaven is a thing of course, which men need not much trouble themselves about. Do they know what they have done? Hitherto all their days they have positively refused the salvation that has been freely tendered to them in Jesus Christ. "Not we," they will say, "we never had such a thought, nor would for all this world." Be it known unto you, inasmuch as you have not effectually received him, you have refused him; and whether your day and season be passed or not, the Lord only knows.

5. This way is *safe*. No soul ever failed in it. There is none in heaven but will say it is a safe way; there is none in hell can say otherwise. It is safe to all that venture on it, so as to enter it. In the old way, we were to preserve ourselves and the way. This preserves itself and us. This is the way which, in the wisdom and love of God in Christ, was provided in the room of another, removed out of the way, because it was not safe, nor could bring us unto God. And here observe,

He tells us the first covenant was *not faultless;* for had it been, there would have been no need of a second. Heb. 8 : 7, 8. The commandment, indeed, which was the matter of that covenant, the same apostle informs us to be holy, just and good. Rom. 7 : 12. But it was faulty to all ends of a covenant: considering our state as sinners, it could not bring us to God. So he acquaints us, "It was made weak through the flesh," Rom. 8 : 3, that is, by the entrance of sin, and so became useless as to the saving of souls. Be it so then; through our sin and default, this good and holy law, this covenant, was made unprofitable to us: but what was that to God? Was he bound to desert his own institution and appointment, because, through our own default, it ceased to be profitable to us? Not at all; he might righteously have bound us all to the terms of that covenant, to stand or fall by them to eternity; yet he would not do so.

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In his love and grace he finds fault with it, Heb. 8 : 8, not in itself and absolutely, but only so far as that he would *provide another* way, which should supply all its defects in reference to the end aimed at. What way that is, the apostle declares in the following verses. The sum is, ver. 12, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." It is the way of pardon and forgiveness. This is substituted in the room of that insufficient way that was removed.

Let us consider, then, whether the infinitely wise and holy God, pursuing his purpose of bringing souls to himself, laying aside one way of his own appointment as unavailing because of the coming in of sin, against which there was no relief found in it, and substituting another way in the room of it, would not provide such a one as should be absolutely free from the faults which he charged upon that which he removed. That which alone rendered the former way faulty was sin : it could do any thing but save a sinner : this then was to be, and is principally provided against in this way of forgiveness. And we see here how clearly God hath severed, yea, and in this matter opposed these two things; namely, the way of personal righteousness, and the way of forgiveness. He finds fault with the first ; what course does he then take ? Does he mend it, take from it what seems to be redundant, mitigate its severity, and supply it where it is wanting by forgiveness, and so set it up anew ? This, indeed, is the way that many proceed in their notions, and the most in their practice. But this is not the way of God ; he takes one utterly away and establishes the other in its place ; and men's endeavors to mix them will be found of little use to them at the last. I can have no great expectation from that which God pronounced faulty.

Also, the unchangeable principles and foundations

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that this way is built upon, render it secure and safe for sinners; for, 1. It is founded on the purpose of God, "The Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith." Gal. 3:8. God would do so, he had purposed and determined to proceed this way; and all the purposes of God are attended with immutability. 2. His promise also is engaged in it, and that given out in the way of a covenant, as has been already declared. And, 3. This promise is confirmed by an oath; and it may be observed that God doth not in any thing interpose with an oath, but what relates to this way of coming to himself by forgiveness. For the oath of God, wherever it is used, respecteth either Christ typically or personally, or the covenant established in him: for, 4. This way is confirmed and ratified in his blood; from whence the apostle at large evinceth its absolute security and safety. Heb. 9. Whatever soul, then, on the invitation under consideration, shall give up himself to come to God by the way proposed, he shall assuredly find absolute peace and security in it. Neither our own weakness from within, nor the opposition of any or all our enemies from without, shall be able to turn us out of this way. See Isa. 35:4–10.

In the other way of salvation by our good deeds, every individual stands upon *his own foundation*, and must do so to the last and utmost of his continuance in this world. You are desirous to go to God, to obtain his favor, and come to an enjoyment of him. What will you do? what course will you fix upon for obtaining these ends? If you were so holy, so perfect, so righteous, so free from sin, as you could desire, you should have some boldness in going to God. But if this be the way you choose, then remember, you stand upon your own personal account all your days, and if you fail in the least, you are gone for ever: for "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point,

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he is guilty of all." James, 2:10. And what peace can you possibly obtain whilst this is your condition? But in the way of forgiveness we all stand upon the account of one common Mediator, in whom we are complete. Col. 2:10. And the want of a due improvement of this truth is a source of discomfort to many souls. Suppose a man to look upon himself as loosed from the covenant of works, wherein exact and perfect righteousness is rigidly required; and to be called to Gospel, evangelical obedience, to be performed in the room thereof, in sincerity and integrity: yet if he must stand in this way purely on his own account, he will never be able to make his comfort hold out to the end of his journey. There will be found in the best of men so many particular failings as to impeach their integrity; and so many questionings will arise, through the darkness of their minds and power of their temptations, as will give but little rest to their souls. Here lies the great security of this way; we abide in it on account of *the faithfulness and ability of our common Mediator*, Jesus Christ.

This is another consideration, strengthening our invitation to close with the true way of coming to God. There is *nothing wanting* that is needful to give infallible security to any soul that shall venture himself upon it. There are terms of peace proposed. These terms are excellent and holy, and chosen of God, tending to his glory, free and safe to sinners. What has any soul in the world to object against them? and in what do men repose their trust and confidence, while neglecting this great salvation? Is it in their lusts and sins, that they will yield them as much satisfaction as they shall

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desire? Alas! they will ruin them and bring forth nothing but death. Is it in the world? it will deceive them; the fashion of it passeth away. Is it in their duties and righteousness? they will not relieve them, for did they follow the law of righteousness they could not obtain the righteousness of the law. Is it in the continuance of their life? Alas! it is but a shadow, a vapor that appeareth for a little while. Is it in a future amendment and repentance? Hell is full of souls perishing under such resolutions. Only this way of pardon remains, and yet of all others it is most despised. I have one more consideration here to add.

6. Consider that this is the only way to *enable you to obedience*, and to render what you do acceptable to God. It may be that you are under the power of convictions, and have made engagements with God to live to him, to keep yourself from sin, and to follow after holiness. It may be you have done so in afflictions, dangers, sicknesses, or on the receipt of mercies; but yet you find that you cannot come to stability or constancy in your course. You break with God and your own soul, which fills you with new disquiet, or else hardens you and makes you secure and negligent; so that you return to your purpose no oftener than convictions or afflictions befall you anew. This condition is ruinous, which nothing can deliver you from but closing with forgiveness. For,

All that you do without this, however it may please your mind or ease your conscience, *is not at all accepted* with God. Unless this foundation be laid, all that you do is lost; all your prayers, all your duties are an abomination to the Lord. Until peace is made with

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him, they are but the acts of enemies, which he despises and abhors; you run, it may be, earnestly, but you run out of the way; you strive, but not lawfully, and shall never receive the crown. True Gospel obedience is the fruit of the faith of forgiveness; whatever you do without it, is but a building without a foundation, a castle in the air. You may see the order of Gospel obedience, Eph. 2; 7–10. The foundation must be laid in grace; riches of grace by Christ, in the free pardon and forgiveness of sin. From hence must the works of obedience proceed, if you would have them to be of God's appointment, or find acceptance with him. Without this, God will say of all your services, worship, obedience, as he did to the Israelites of old, Amos, 5: 21–25, I despise it all, reject it all. It is not to him, nor to his glory. Now, if you are under convictions of any sort, there is nothing you more value, nothing you more place your confidence in, than your duties, your repentance, your amendment, what you do, and what in good time you will be. Are you not conscious that you would be greatly unwilling to lose all the hopes and all expectations which you have from hence? to have no other reception with God, than if all this while you had been wallowing in your sins? Yet thus it is with you, if you have not begun with God on his own terms. If you have not received the atonement in the blood of his Son, if you are not made partakers of forgiveness, if your persons are not pardoned, all your duties are accursed.

This alone will supply such motives and encouragements to obedience as will give you *life and delight in it.* You perform duties, but it is with heaviness, fear,

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and in bondage. If you could do as well without them as with them; if conscience would be quiet, and hope of eternity hold out, you would omit them for ever. This makes all your obedience burdensome, and you cry out in your thoughts, "Behold, what a weariness is it!" The service of God is the only drudgery of your lives which you dare not omit, and delight not to perform. From this wretched frame nothing can deliver you but this closing with forgiveness. This will give you such motives, such encouragements as will greatly influence you. It will give you freedom and cheerfulness in all duties of Gospel obedience. You will find a constraining power in the love of Christ; a freedom from bondage, when the Son truly hath made you free. Faith and love will work genuinely and naturally in your spirits; and that which was your greatest burden will become your chief joy. 2 Cor. 6 : 1. Thoughts of the love of God, of the blood of Christ, of the covenant of grace, and sense of pardon in them, will enlarge your hearts and sweeten all your duties. You will find a new life, a new pleasure, a new satisfaction, in all that you do. Have you yet ever understood the saying of the wise man, Prov. 3 : 17, "The ways of wisdom are pleasantness, and her paths are peace?" Have the ways of holiness, of obedience, of duty, been so to you? Whatever you pretend, they are not, they cannot be so whilst you are strangers to that which alone can render them so to you. I speak to them that are under the law. Would you be free from that bondage, that galling yoke in duties of obedience? Would you have all that you do towards God a delight and pleasantness to you? This, and this alone, will effect it.

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This will place all your obedience *on a sure and right basis;* even the same that is fixed on in the Gospel. For the present, all that you do is indeed but to compound with God for your sin; you hope, by what you do for him and to him, to buy off what you have done against him, that you may not fall into the hands of his wrath and vengeance. This makes all you do to be irksome. As a man that labors all his days to pay an old debt, and brings in nothing to lay up for himself, how tedious and wearisome is his toil! It is likely that by and by he will give over, and run away from his creditor. So it is in this case: men who have secret reserves of recompensing God by their obedience, every day find their debt growing upon them, and have every day less hope of making a satisfactory payment. This makes them weary, and for the most part they faint under their discouragements, and at length they fly wholly from God. This way alone will give peace to your conscience; it will give you to see that all your debts are paid by Christ, and freely forgiven to you by God. So that what you do is of gratitude or thankfulness, and leads to the glory of God, the honor of Christ, and your own comfortable account at the last day. This encourages the soul to labor, to trade, to endeavor; all things now conspire to his spiritual advantage.

This is the sum of what has been said: the obedience that you perform under your convictions is burdensome and unpleasant to you; and it is altogether unacceptable to God. You lose all you do, and all that you hope to do hereafter, if the foundation be not laid in the receiving of pardon in the blood of Christ. It is high time

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to cast down all that vain and imaginary fabric which you have been erecting, and to go about laying a new foundation which you may safely and cheerfully build upon; a building that will abide for ever.

Again, it is a way so excellent, so precious, so near the heart of God, so relating to the blood of Christ, that *the neglect of it will assuredly be sorely revenged of the Lord.* Let not men think that they may despise the wisdom and love of the Father, the blood of the Son, and the promises of the Gospel with impunity. Let us, in few words, take a view of what the Holy Ghost speaks to this purpose. There are three ways whereby the vengeance due to the neglect of closing with forgiveness or gospel-grace is expressed.

It is done *positively;* "He that believeth not shall be DAMNED." Mark, 16:16. That is a hard word; many men cannot endure to hear it. They would not have it named, and are ready to fly in the face of him from whose mouth it proceeds. But let not men deceive themselves, this is the softest word that mercy, and love itself, that Christ, that the Gospel speaks to despisers of forgiveness. It is Christ who is this legal terrifying preacher; it is he who cries out, "If you believe not, ye shall be damned;" and he will come himself in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them that obey not the Gospel. 2 Thess. 1:8. This is the end of the disobedient, if God, if Christ, if the Gospel may be believed.

The penalty of this unbelief is *contrasted* with the vengeance due to the breach of the law. We are, in the preaching of forgiveness by Christ, to them that perish, a savor of death unto death; 2 Cor. 2:16; a

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deep death, a sore condemnation; so, Heb. 10 : 29, "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy?" Sorer than ever was threatened by the law, or inflicted for the breach of it; not as to the kind, but the degree of punishment. Hence arises the addition of many stripes.

It is also expressed by way of admiration at the inexpressibleness and unavoidableness of the punishment due to such sinners; "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" Heb. 2 : 3. Surely if there is no way for men to escape, they shall unavoidably perish who neglect so great salvation. So the Holy Ghost says, "What shall be the end of them that obey not the Gospel?" 1 Pet. 4 : 17. What understanding can reach to an apprehension of their miserable and woful condition? None can, saith the Holy Ghost; nor can it be spoken to their capacity; ah! what shall be their end? There remains nothing but a "certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, that shall consume the adversaries." Heb. 10 : 27. A certain fearful expectation of astonishing things that cannot be comprehended.

In view of what has been said, let us now a little confer together with the words of truth and sobriety. I speak to such poor souls, as, having deceived themselves or neglected utterly their eternal condition, are not as yet really, and in truth, made partakers of this forgiveness. Your present state is sad and deplorable; there is nothing but the woful uncertainty of a dying life between you and eternal ruin. The persuasion you have of forgiveness is good for nothing but to

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harden you, and destroy you; it is not the forgiveness that is with God; nor have you taken it up on gospel-grounds or evidences. You have stolen painted beads, and take yourselves to be lawful possessors of pearls and jewels. As you are, then, any way concerned in your own eternal condition, into which you are entering, (and how soon you shall be in it you know not,) prevail with yourselves to attend a little to the exhortation that lies before you. It is your own business that you are entreated to have regard to.

1. Consider seriously on what you are founding your hopes and expectations for eternity. Great men, and wise in other things, are here very apt to deceive themselves. They suppose they think and believe very differently from what they do, as their cry at the last day will manifest. Give your attention a little to the subject. Do you seriously think of these things? Or, are you so under the power of ignorance and darkness that you neglect and despise them? Or, do you rise up and lie down, and perform some duties, or neglect them, with great coldness, remissness, and indifference of spirit, like Gallio, not much caring for these things? Or, do you relieve yourselves with hopes of future amendment, purposing that, if you live, you will be other persons than you are, when such and such things are accomplished? Or, do you not hope well in general on account of what you have done and will do? If any of these be your condition, it is unspeakably miserable. You lie down and rise up under the wrath of the great God, who will prevail at last, and there shall be none to deliver. If you say, Nay, this is not our state, we rely on mercy and forgiveness: then let me, in the

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fear of the great God, entreat a few things yet further of you.

2. That you would seriously consider whether the forgiveness you rest on, and hope in, be *true gospel forgiveness* which we have described? or is it only a general apprehension of impunity though you are sinners: that God is merciful, and you hope that you shall escape the vengeance of hell fire? If it be thus with you, forgiveness itself will not relieve you. Gospel pardon is a thing of another nature: it hath its spring in the gracious heart of the Father; is made out by a sovereign act of his will; rendered consistent with the glory of his justice and holiness by the blood of Christ, by which it is purchased in the covenant of grace. If you say, Yea, this is the forgiveness we rely upon, it is that which you have described; then I desire further, that you would,

3. Examine your own hearts *how you came to have an interest* in this forgiveness, to close with it, and to have a right to it. A man may deceive himself as effectually by supposing that true riches are his when they are not, as by supposing his false and counterfeit money to be good and current; how, then, came you to be interested in this gospel-forgiveness? If it hath come to you, you know not how; if a lifeless, barren, inoperative persuasion of it hath crept upon your minds; be not mistaken, God will come and require his forgiveness at your hand, and it shall appear that you have had no part nor portion in it. If you shall say, Nay, but we were convinced of sin, and rendered exceedingly unquiet in our consciences, and on that account looked out after forgiveness, which hath given us rest; then I desire,

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4. That you would diligently consider *to what ends and purposes* you have received and do make use of this gospel forgiveness. Hath it been to make up what was wanting, and to get quiet in your own consciences? that, whereas you could not answer your convictions with your duties, you would seek for relief from forgiveness. This, and innumerable other ways there are whereby men may lose their souls when they think all is well with them. Whence is that caution of the apostle, "Looking diligently, lest any one should seem to fail, or come short of the grace of God." Heb. 12 : 15. Men come short of it, when they pretend themselves to be in pursuit of it, yea, to have overtaken and possessed it. Now, if any of these should prove to be your condition, I desire,

5. That you would consider seriously whether it be not high time for you to *look out for a way of deliverance* and escape, that you may save yourselves from this evil world and fly from the wrath to come. The Judge stands at the door. Before he deal with you as a judge, he knocks with a tender of mercy. Who knows but this may be the last time? Be you old or young, you have but your season, but your day; it may perhaps be night with you when it is day with the rest of the world. Your sun may go down at noon; and God may swear, that you shall not enter into his rest. If you are then resolved to continue in your present condition, I have no more to say. I am pure from your blood, in that I have declared to you the counsel of God; and so I must leave you to an exposed trial between the great God and your souls at the last day. Poor creatures! I tremble even to think how he will tear you in pieces,

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when there shall be none to deliver. Methinks I see your poor, destitute, forlorn souls, forsaken of the pleasures of sin, of the world, friends, angels, men, trembling before the throne of God, full of horror and fearful expectation of the dreadful sentence. O that I could mourn over you so as to prevail with you, whilst you are yet joined to all the living; while there is yet hope. O that in this your day you knew the things of your peace!

If you say, Nay, but we will seek the Lord whilst he may be found, we will draw nigh to him before he cause darkness; then consider, I pray,

6. What Joshua told the children of Israel when they formed such a resolution and cried out, "We will serve the Lord our God." chap. 24 : 18. "Ye cannot serve the Lord for *he is an holy God*, a jealous God, he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins." If you go to him upon your own account, and in your own strength, with your own best endeavors and duties, you will find him too holy for you to deal with. You will obtain neither acceptance of your persons nor pardon of your sins. But you will say, These are heavy tidings. If we sit still, we perish; and if we rise to be doing, it will not be better; is there no hope left for our souls? must we pine away under our sins, and the wrath of God for ever? God forbid. There are yet other directions remaining, to guide you out of these entanglements. Wherefore,

7. Ponder seriously on what has been spoken of this way of approaching to God. Consider it in its own nature as to all the ends and purposes for which it is proposed of God. Consider whether you approve of it or not.

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Do you judge it a way fitted to bring glory to God? Doth it answer all the wants and distresses of your souls? Do you think it excellent, safe and glorious to those who have entered it? Or, have you any thing to object against it? Return your answer to Him in whose name and by whose appointment these words are spoken to you. If you say, We are convinced that this way of forgiveness is the only way for the relief and deliverance of our souls, then,

8. *Abhor yourselves* for all your blindness and obstinacy whereby you have hitherto despised the love of God, the blood of Christ, and the tenders of pardon in the Gospel. Be abased and humbled to the dust in a sense of your vileness. And,

9. Labor to exercise your hearts greatly with thoughts of *that abundant grace* which is manifested in this way of sinners coming to God; as also, of the excellency of the Gospel wherein it is unfolded. Consider the eternal love of the Father, which is the fountain and spring of this whole dispensation; the inexpressible love of the Son, in establishing and confirming it, in removing all hinderances and obstructions by his own blood, bringing forth to beauty and glory this redemption or forgiveness of sin. And let the glory of the Gospel, which alone makes this discovery of forgiveness in God, dwell in your hearts. Let your mind be exercised about these things. You will find effects from them above all that hath as yet been wrought in your souls. What for the most part have you hitherto been conversant about? When you have risen above the turmoil of lusts and corruptions in your hearts, the entanglements of your callings, business and affairs, what have you been able

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to raise your hearts to? Perplexing fears about your condition, general hopes, without savor or relish, yielding you no refreshment; legal commands, bondage duties, distracted consciences, broken purposes and promises by which you have been tossed up and down without any certain rest. And what effects have these thoughts produced? Have they made you more holy and more humble? Have they given you delight in God and strength to new obedience? Not at all. Where you were, there you still are, without the least progress. But now bring your souls to these springs, and try the Lord, if from that day you be not blessed with spiritual stores.

10. If the Lord be pleased to carry on your souls thus far, then stir up yourselves to choose and close with *the way of forgiveness that has been revealed*. Choose it only, choose it in the comparison with and in opposition to all others. Say you will be for Christ, and not for another; and be so accordingly. Here venture, here repose, here rest your souls. It is a way of peace, safety, holiness, beauty, strength, power, liberty and glory; you have the nature, the name, the love, the purposes, the promises, the covenant, the oath of God; the love, life, death or blood, the mediation or oblation and intercession of Jesus Christ; the power and efficacy of the Spirit, and gospel-grace by him administered, to give you assurance of the excellency, the oneness, the safety of the way which you are choosing.

If now the Lord shall be pleased to persuade your hearts to enter upon the path marked out before you, and shall carry you on through the various exercises of it unto this exercise of true faith, God will have the

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glory, the Gospel will be exalted, and your own souls shall reap the eternal benefit of this exhortation.

But now, if, notwithstanding all that has been said, all the invitations you have had, and the encouragements that have been held out to you, you will continue to despise this so great salvation, and will live and die in the state wherein you are; why, then, as the prophet said to the wife of Jeroboam, Come near, for I am sent unto you with heavy tidings. I say, then,

11. If you resolve to continue in the neglect of this salvation, and shall do so, then *you shall be cursed* of the Lord, with all the curses that are written in the law, and all the curses that are denounced against despisers of the Gospel. Yea, you shall be *anathema maranatha;* cursed in this world until the coming of the Lord; and when the Lord comes, be cursed from his presence into everlasting destruction. Yea, all the holy angels of God shall curse you as the obstinate enemies of their King and Head, the Lord Jesus Christ: the church of Christ shall curse you as despisers of that love and mercy which is their portion, their life, their inheritance: all the saints of God, all that love the Lord shall curse you and rejoice to see the Lord coming forth mightily, and prevailing against you to your everlasting ruin. Why should any one have a thought of compassion towards those who despise the compassion of God? or of mercy towards those who trample on the blood of Christ? Whilst there is yet hope, we desire to have continual sorrow for you; and to travail in soul for your conversion to God; but if you be hardened in your way, shall we join with you against him? shall we prefer you above his glory? shall we desire your salvation with the despoil

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ing God of his honor? Nay, God forbid; we hope to reign and rejoice with Christ, even while we see all that vengeance and indignation that is in the right hand of God, poured out unto eternity upon your souls. Prov. 1 : 21–33.

CHAPTER XIII.

RULES FOR OBTAINING FORGIVENESS.

That which remains, according to the plan of this treatise, is to persuade souls, more or less entangled in the depths of sin, to close with this forgiveness by believing unto their peace and consolation. And because such persons are full of pleas and objections against themselves, I shall chiefly, in what I have to say, endeavor to obviate these objections, and thus to encourage both distressed and doubting souls to believe, and bring them to the establishment and consolation which our subject affords. And I shall,

First, lay down such general rules as are necessary to be observed by all who intend to come to gospel-peace and comfort. And,

Secondly, consider some such objections as seem to be most comprehensive of those special reasonings wherewith distressed persons usually entangle themselves.

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I shall begin with GENERAL RULES, which, through the grace of Christ and supplies of his Spirit, may be of use to unbelievers in the condition under consideration.

RULE I. *Be not judges of your own condition, but let Christ judge.*

You are invited to take the comfort of this gospel-truth, that there is forgiveness with God. You say it is not for you: so said Jacob, "My way is hid from the Lord," Isa. 40 : 27; and Zion said so too, chap. 49 : 14, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." But did they make a right judgment of themselves? We find in those places that God was otherwise minded. This false judgment made by souls in their entanglements, of their own condition, is often a most unconquerable hinderance to the bettering of it: they fill themselves with thoughts of their own about it, and on them they dwell, instead of looking out for a remedy. Misgiving thoughts of their diseases are a great part of some men's sickness. Many diseases cloud the thoughts, and cause misapprehensions concerning their own nature and danger; and those delusions are a real part of the person's sickness. Nature is no less impaired and weakened by them, the efficacy of remedies no less obstructed than by any other real disease. In such cases, we persuade men to acquiesce in the judgment of their skilful physician, not always to be wasting themselves by their own imaginations, and so despond upon their own mistakes; but to rest in the testimony of Him who is acquainted with the causes and tendency of their indisposition better than themselves

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It is often one part of the soul's depths to have false apprehensions of its condition. Sin is a madness. Eccles. 9 : 3. Madness does not sooner nor more effectually discover itself in any way than in possessing men with strange conceits and apprehensions of themselves So does this madness of sin, according to its degrees and prevalence. Hence some cry, Peace, peace, when sudden destruction is at hand. 1 Thess. 5 : 3. It is that madness, under the power of which they are, which gives them such groundless imaginations of themselves and their own condition. And some say they are lost for ever, when God is with them.

Do then your duty, and let Christ judge of your state. Your interest is too great to be committed to any other. When eternal welfare or wo are at stake, for a man to give up himself implicitly to the judgment of men fallible like himself, is stupidity; but there is no danger of being deceived by the sentence of Christ. The truth is, whether we will or not, he will judge; and according as he determines, so shall things be found at the last day. John, 5 : 22. "The Father judgeth no man," that is, immediately, and in his own person, "but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." All judgment that respects eternity, whether it be to be passed in this world or in that to come, is committed to him. Accordingly in this chapter he judgeth both of things and persons: of things, ver. 24, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." Let men say what they please, this sentence shall stand; faith and eternal life are inseparably conjoined. And so of persons, ver. 38, "You

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have not," saith he to the Pharisees, who were full of unbelief, "the word of God abiding in you."

Take not, then, the office and prerogative of Christ out of his hand, by making a judgment from your own reasonings and conclusions as to your state. You will find that he often determines quite contrary to what men judge of themselves, and to what others judge of them. Some he judges to be in an evil condition, who are very confident that it is well with them, and who please themselves in the thought that others also think they are safe; and he judges the state of some to be good, who are diffident of themselves, and, it may be, despised by others. We may single out an example or two in each kind.

Laodicea's judgment of her spiritual state we have, Rev. 3 : 17, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." A fair state it seems, a blessed condition! She wants nothing that may contribute to her rest, peace, and reputation; she is orthodox, and numerous, and flourishing; makes a fair profession, and all is well within. So she believes, so she reports of herself; wherein there is a secret reflection also upon others whom she despises. Let them shift as they list, I am as I say. But was it so with her indeed? was that her true condition, of which she was so confident as to profess it unto all? Let Jesus Christ be heard in this cause, let him come and judge: "Thus saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness." Coming to give sentence in a case of this importance, he gives himself this title, that we may know his word is to be acquiesced in. Every man, saith he, is a liar; their testimony is of no value, let them pronounce what they

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will of themselves or of one another: "I am the Amen; and I will see whose word shall stand, mine or theirs." What then saith he of Laodicea? "Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Oh woful and sad disappointment! Oh dreadful surprisal! Ah! how many Laodicean churches have we in the world! How many professors are members of these churches! not to mention the generality of men that live under the means of grace, who all have good hopes of their eternal condition, while they are despised and abhorred by the only Judge. Among professors themselves, it is dreadful to think how many will be found light when they come to be weighed in this balance

Again, he judges some to be in a good condition, be they themselves ever so diffident: saith he to the church of *Smyrna*, "I know thy poverty." Rev. 2: 9. Smyrna was complaining that she was a poor contemptible people, not fit for him to take any notice of. Well, saith he, fear not; I know thy poverty whereof thou complainest: "but thou art rich;" that is my judgment, testimony and sentence concerning thee and thy condition. Such will be his judgment at the last day, when both those on the one hand and the other shall be surprised with his sentence: the one with joy at the riches of his grace, the other with terror at the severity of his justice. Matt. 25: 37–39, and 44, 45. In Isaiah, 49: 14, "Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me:" that is her judgment of herself, and of her state; a sad report and conclusion. But doth Christ agree with her in this sentence? The next verse gives us his resolution of this matter: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on

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the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." The state of things in truth, is as much otherwise as can possibly be thought or imagined.

To what purpose is it for men to be passing a judgment on themselves, when there is no manner of certainty in their determinations, and when their proceedings will probably lead them to further entanglements, if not to eternal ruin. The judging of souls, as to their spiritual state, is the work of Jesus Christ; especially as to the end now under inquiry. Men may, men do take many ways to make a judgment of themselves. Some do it on slight and trivial conjectures; some on bold and wicked presumptions; some on desperate atheistical notions, as Deut. 29 : 19; some, with more sobriety and sense of eternity, lay down principles, it may be, good and true in themselves; and from them they draw conclusions, arguing from one thing to another, and in the end either deceive themselves, or sit down no less in the dark than they were at first. A man's judgment from his own reasonings is seldom true, more seldom permanent. I speak not of self-examination with a due discussion of graces and actions, but of the final sentence as to state and condition in which the soul is to acquiesce. This belongs to Christ.

Now, there are two ways whereby the Lord Jesus Christ gives forth his sentence in this matter.

1. *By his word.* He determines, in the word of the Gospel, the state of all men. Each individual coming to that word, receives his own sentence and doom: he told the Jews that Moses accused them, John, 5 : 45, his law accused and condemned the transgressors of it.

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And so does he acquit every one that is discharged by the word of the Gospel. What we have to do is to receive by faith his sentence in the word. His process herein we have recorded: "His soul," that is, of the sinner, "draweth near to the grave, and his life to the destroyers." This seems to be his state; it is so indeed: he is at the very brink of the grave and hell. What then? why, if there be with him (or stand over him, in the Hebrew) the angel interpreting, or the angel of the covenant, who alone is the One of a thousand, what shall he do? He shall show to him his uprightness. Job, 33 : 22, 23. He shall give him a right determination of his interest in God, and of the state of his heart towards God: whereupon God shall speak peace to his soul, and deliver him from his entanglements, ver. 24. Jesus Christ has, in the word of the Gospel, stated the condition of every man. He tells us that sinners, of what sort soever they are, who believe, are accepted with him, and shall receive forgiveness from God, and that none shall be refused or cast off that come to God by him. The soul of whom we are treating is now upon the work of coming to God for forgiveness by Jesus Christ. Many and weighty objections it hath in and against itself why it should not come, why it shall not be accepted. Our Lord Jesus, the Wisdom of God, foresaw all these objections; he knew what could be said in the case. In general, men's arguings against themselves arise from sin and the law. Christ knows what is in both. He tried them to the uttermost, as to their penalties: and yet he hath so determined as we have showed. Particular objections also arise from the consideration of particular sins; their greatness, their number, their

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aggravations: Christ knows all these also; and declares that he that believes shall be forgiven; and it is meet his word should stand. I know, when a soul brings itself to be judged by the word of the Gospel, it does not always equally receive and rest in the sentence given But when Christ is pleased to speak the word with power to men, they shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and be comforted by it. Let the soul, then, that is rising out of depths, and pressing towards a sense of forgiveness, lay itself down before the word of Christ in the Gospel. Let him attend to what Christ speaks; and if, for a while, it has not power to quiet his heart, let him wait a season, and light shall arise to him out of darkness. Christ will give his sentence into his conscience with such power and efficacy that he shall find rest and peace in it.

2. Christ also judgeth *by his Spirit:* not only in making this sentence of the Gospel to be received effectually in the soul, but by his peculiar actings upon the heart and soul of a believer. "We have received the Spirit of God that we may know the things that are freely given us of God." 1 Cor. 2: 12. The Spirit of Christ acquaints the soul that this and that grace is from him, that this or that duty was performed in his strength. He brings to mind what at such and such times was wrought in men by himself, to give them support and relief in depths and darkness. And when it has been clearly discovered to the soul by the Holy Ghost, that any thing wrought in it or done by it has been truly saving, the comfort of it will abide in the midst of many shakings and temptations.

3. He also, by his Spirit, bears witness with our spi-

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rits as to our state; of which I have spoken largely elsewhere.

This, then, is our first general rule and direction. Self-determinations concerning our spiritual condition are seldom right; and mistakes in such determinations are exceedingly prejudicial to a soul seeking a sense of forgiveness. Let Christ, then, be the judge in this case by his word and Spirit.

RULE II. *Self-condemnation and abhorrence for sin are consistent with gospel-justification and peace.*

Some men, strange as it may seem, have no peace, because they have that without which it is impossible they should have peace. Because they cannot but condemn themselves, they cannot entertain a sense that God acquits them. But this is the mystery of the Gospel to which unbelief is a stranger. Nothing but faith can give a real subsistence to these things in the same soul at the same time. It is easy to learn the notion of it, but it is not easy to experience the power of it. For a man to have a sight of that within him which would condemn him, and for which he is troubled; and at the same time to have a discovery of that without him which will justify him, and to rejoice therein, is what he is not led unto but by faith in the mystery of the Gospel. We are under a law for justification which excludes all boasting. Rom. 3:27. So that, though we have joy enough in Another, yet we may have, we always have, sufficient cause of humiliation in ourselves. The Gospel will teach a man to feel sin and believe righteousness at the same time. Faith will carry heaven in one hand and hell in the other; showing the

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one deserved, the other purchased. A man may see enough of his own sin and folly to bring a hell of wrath out of heaven, and yet see Christ bring a heaven of blessedness out of a hell of punishment; and these must needs produce very divers, yea, contrary effects and operations in the soul. And he who knows not how to assign them their proper duties and seasons must needs be perplexed. The work of self-condemnation, then, which men in these depths cannot but abound with, is, in the disposition of the covenant of grace, no way inconsistent with nor unsuited to justification, and the enjoyment, through it, of peace with God. There may be a deep sense of sin where there is no fear of hell. David was never more humbled for sin than when Nathan told him it was forgiven; and there may be a view of hell as deserved, which yet the soul may know itself to be freed from.

In pursuing my design, I shall briefly consider what we intend by *gospel-assurance of forgiveness*, that the soul may not be solicitous and perplexed about the utter want of that of which perhaps it is already in some enjoyment.

Some men seem to place gospel-assurance in a high confidence of acceptance with God. They think it is in none but such as, if you ask them, Are you certain you shall be saved? have boldness, and confidence, and ostentation to answer presently, Yea, I shall be saved. But as the blessed truth of assurance has been reproached in the world, under such a notion of it; so such expressions become not those who know what it is to have to do with the holy God, who is a consuming fire. Hence some conclude that there are very few believers

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who have any assurance, because they have not this confidence, or are more free to mention the opposition they meet with than the support they enjoy. And thus assurance is thought to be a grace not earnestly to be sought after, because it is so rarely to be obtained, most of the saints going to heaven well enough without it. But the fact is otherwise. The importance of it, not only as it is our life of comfort and joy, but also as it is the principal means of the flourishing of our life of holiness, has been already shown. Yea, in times of trial, which are the proper seasons for the effectual working and manifestation of assurance, it appears that many, yea, that most of the saints of God are made partakers of this grace and privilege.

I shall then, 1. Show what things are not only consistent with assurance, but are even necessary concomitants of it, which yet, if not duly weighed and considered, may seem to prevent a man's comfortable persuasion of his condition before God; and, 2. Speak of its nature especially as manifesting itself by its effects.

1. A deep sense of the evil of sin, and of *the guilt of one's own sin*, is no way inconsistent with gospel-assurance of acceptance with God through Christ, and of forgiveness in him. By a sense of the guilt of sin I understand two things: 1. A clear conviction of sin by the Holy Ghost, saying to the soul, Thou art the man; and 2. A sense of the displeasure of God, or the wrath due to sin, according to the sentence of the law. Both these David expresses in that complaint, "My life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed. Psalm 31 : 10. His iniquity was before

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him, and a sense of it pressed him sore. But yet, notwithstanding all this, he had a comfortable persuasion that God was his God in covenant, "I trusted in thee, O Lord: I said Thou art my God." verse 14. And the tenor of the covenant wherein alone God is the God of any person is, that he will be merciful to his iniquity. To whom he is a God, he is so according to the tenor of that covenant; so that here these two are conjoined. Saith he, Lord, I am pressed with the sense of the guilt of mine iniquities; and thou art my God, who forgivest them. The ground of this is, that God, by the Gospel, hath divided the work of the law, and taken part of it out of its hand. Its whole work is to condemn the sin and the sinner. The sinner is freed by the Gospel; but the law still condemns the sin, and that justly. Now, though the sinner himself be freed, yet finding his sin condemned, it fills him with a deep sense of its guilt, and of the displeasure of God against it; while yet at the same time he may have such an insight as faith gives into his personal interest in a gospel-acquittance. A man then may have a deep sense of sin all his days, walk under the sense of it continually, abhor himself for his ingratitude, unbelief, and rebellion against God, without any impeachment of his assurance.

2. Deep *sorrow for sin* is consistent with assurance of forgiveness; yea, it is a great means of preserving it. Godly sorrow, mourning, humiliation, contriteness of spirit are no less gospel-graces and fruits of the Holy Ghost than faith itself; and so are consistent with the highest flourishing of faith. It is heaven itself, and not the assurance of it, that will wipe all tears from our eyes.

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Yea, these graces have the most eminent promises annexed to them; as Isa. 57: 15; 66: 2; Matt. 5: 4; Zech. 12: 10; so that they are assuredly consistent with any other grace or privilege that we may be made partakers of, or which are promised to us. Some feeling the weight and burden of their sin, and being called to mourning and humiliation on account of it, are so taken up with it as to lose the sense of forgiveness which, rightly improved, would increase their sorrow for sin, as their sorrow seems directly to sweeten their sense of forgiveness. Sorrow, absolutely exclusive of the faith of forgiveness, is legal, and tends to death; assurance, absolutely exclusive of godly sorrow, is presumption, and not a persuasion from Him that calleth us. But gospel sorrow and gospel assurance may well dwell in the same breast at the same time. Indeed, as in worldly joys there is a secret wound, so in all godly sorrow and mourning, considered in itself, there is a secret joy and refreshment; hence it doth not wither and dry up, but rather enlarge, open, and refresh the heart. I am persuaded that generally they mourn most who have most assurance. And all true gospel mourners will be found to have the root of assurance so grafted in them that in its proper season it will undoubtedly flourish.

3. A deep sense of *the indwelling power of sin* is consistent with gospel-assurance. Sense of indwelling sin will cause manifold perplexities in the soul. Trouble, disquiet, sorrow and anguish of heart, expressing themselves in sighs, mourning, groaning for deliverance, always attend it. To what purpose do you speak to a soul highly sensible of the power of indwelling sin, concerning assurance? "Alas," saith he, "I am ready to

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perish every moment; my sins are strong, active, restless, yea, outrageous; they give me no rest, no liberty, and but little success do I gain in resisting them. Assurance is for conquerors, for them that live at rest and peace. I lie grovelling on the ground all my days, and must needs be uncertain what will be the issue." But when such an one hath said all he can, he will not be able to make more woful complaints of this than Paul has done before him, Rom. 7; and yet he closes the discourse of it with as high an expression of assurance as any person need seek after, ver. 25, and chap. 8:1. But if men will think they can have no assurance, because they have that without which it is impossible they should have any, it is hard to give them relief. A little cruse of the salt of the Gospel cast into the bitter waters will make them sweet and wholesome. Sense of the guilt of sin may consist with faith of its pardon and forgiveness in the blood of Christ. Godly sorrow may dwell in the heart at the same time with joy in the Holy Ghost, and groaning after deliverance from the power of sin, at the same time with a gracious persuasion that sin shall not "have dominion over us, because we are not under the law, but grace."

4. *Doubtings*, *fears*, *temptations*, if not ordinarily prevailing, are consistent with gospel-assurance. Though the devil's power be limited in reference to the saints, yet his hands are not tied; though he cannot prevail against them, yet he can assault them: and although there be not an evil heart of unbelief in believers, yet there will still be unbelief in their hearts. Such an evidence and persuasion of acceptance with God as exclude all contrary reasonings, as suffer the soul to hear

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nothing of objections, and free and quiet it from all assaults, are neither mentioned in Scripture, nor are they consistent with that state wherein we walk before God, nor possible, on account of Satan's will and ability to tempt, or of our own remaining unbelief. Assurance encourages us in our combat, it delivers us not from it. We may have peace with God when we have none from the assaults of Satan.

Now, unless a man duly consider the tenor of the cove nant wherein we walk with God, and the nature of that gospel-obedience which he requires at our hands, and our state whilst we live in this world; the daily sense of these things may keep him in the dark unto himself, and hinder him from that establishment in believing to which otherwise he might attain. On this account, some as holy persons as any in this world, being wholly taken up with the consideration of these home-bred perplexities, and not clearly acquainted with the way and tenor of assuring their souls before God, according to the rule of the covenant of grace, have passed their days in bondage of spirit, and without that strong consolation which God is abundantly willing that all the heirs of promise should receive.

Again, evangelical assurance is not a thing *incapable of variation.* It may be higher or lower, greater or less, obscure or attended with more evidence. It is not quite lost when not at its height. God sometimes marvellously raises the souls of his saints by some near approaches to them; gives them a sense of his eternal love, a taste of the embraces of his Son, and the indwelling of the Spirit, without the least intervening dis-

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turbance; then this is their assurance. But this life is not a season to be always taking wages in; our work is not yet done, we are not always to abide in this mount; we must down again into the battle, fight again, cry again, complain again. Shall the soul be thought now to have lost its assurance? Not at all: it had before assurance with joy, triumph, and exultation; it has it now with wrestling, cries, tears, and supplications: and a man's assurance may be as good, as true, when he lies on the earth with a sense of sin, as when he is carried up to the third heaven with a sense of love and foretaste of glory. In brief, this assurance of salvation is such a gracious evangelical persuasion of acceptance with God in Christ, and of an interest in the promises of preservation unto the end, wrought in believers by the Holy Ghost, in and through the exercise of faith, as, for the most part, produces these effects following.

1. It gives *delight in obedience*, and draws out love in the duties that we perform to God. So much assurance of a blessed end of their labors and duties, and pressing after universal renovation of mind and life, as may make them cheerful and give love and delight in the pursuit of what they are engaged in, is needful for the saints, and they are not often left without it; and where this is, there is gospel-assurance. To run as men uncertain, to fight as those that beat the air, to travel as not any way persuaded of a comfortable entertainment at the journey's end, is a state in which God does not frequently leave his people. And when he does, it is a season wherein he receives very little glory from them, and they very little increase of grace in themselves.

Many things interpose, many doubts and entangling

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perplexities arise, but still a comfortable persuasion is kept alive that there is a rest provided, which makes them cheerful in their most difficult duties. This prevails in them, that their labor in the Lord, their watching, praying, suffering, alms, fighting against temptation, crucifying the flesh with its lusts, shall not be in vain. This gives them such a delight in their most difficult duties, as men have in a hard journey towards a desirable home or a place of rest.

2. It *casts out tormenting fear*, such as fills the soul with perplexing uncertainties, hard thoughts of God, and dreadful apprehensions of wrath to come. There are three things in that fear which are inconsistent with the assurance of forgiveness: 1. It proceeds from a spirit of bondage: "We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear." Rom. 8 : 15. It is not such a fear as makes an occasional incursion upon the mind, such as is occasioned by incidental darkness and temptation, such as the best and most assured persons are liable to; but it is such a fear as has a complete abiding principle in the soul, even a spirit of bondage, a prevailing frame constantly inclining it to fear, or dreadful apprehensions of God and its own condition. 2. It *tends* to bondage, it brings the soul into bondage. Heb. 2 : 14, 15. Christ died to deliver them, who, by fear of death, were in bondage all their days. Fear of death as penal, as it lies in the curse, which is that fear that proceeds from a spirit of bondage, brings the soul into bondage, that is, it adds to fear weariness, trouble, and anxiety of mind, and puts men upon all ways and means imaginable to seek for a remedy or relief. 3. It hath torment; "fear hath torment." 1 John, 4 : 18. It gives no rest,

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no quietness to the mind. Now, this is so cast out by gospel-assurance of forgiveness, that though it may assault the soul, it shall not possess it; though it make incursions upon it, it shall not abide and prevail in it.

3. It gives the soul *a hope and expectation* of the glory that shall be revealed, and supports it in sufferings and temptations. This is the hope which makes not ashamed, Rom. 5 : 5, and that because it will never expose the soul to disappointment. Wherever there is the root of assurance there will be this fruit of hope. The proper object of it is things absent, invisible, eternal; the promised reward, in all its fulness. This hope it cherishes in distresses, temptations, failings, and under a sense of the guilt and power of sin. Hence arises a spring of secret relief in the soul, something that claims the heart and quiets the spirit in the midst of many a storm. Now, as wherever assurance is, there will be this hope; so wherever this secret relieving hope is, it grows on no other root but a living persuasion of a union with Christ and a personal interest in the things hoped for.

4. As it will do many other things, so, that I may give one comprehensive instance, it will enable men even *to die for Christ.* Death to men who see not one step beyond it, has been esteemed of all things most terrible: but this is little, compared with looking through it as a passage into eternity. For a man to choose death, in the most terrible manner of its approach, rather than life, expecting an eternity to ensue, argues a comfortable persuasion of a good state after death. Now, I am persuaded that there are hundreds who, upon gospel-saving accounts, would embrace the stake for the testimony of Jesus, who still are unconscious that they have

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the assurance we speak of, and yet nothing else would enable them thereunto.

RULE III. *Continuance in waiting on God necessary to peace and consolation.*

Whatever be your condition, and your apprehension of it, yet continue waiting on God, and give not over through weariness or impatience. This rule contains the sum of the great example given us in this psalm. Forgiveness in God being discovered, though no sense of a particular interest therein is yet obtained, what the soul next applies itself to is diligent, careful, constant waiting on God, which is variously expressed in the 5th and 6th verses of the psalm on which our discourse is founded. The Holy Ghost tells us that "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." Psalm 92 : 11. Light and gladness are the things now inquired after: deliverance from darkness, misapprehensions of God, and misgiving thoughts of one's own condition. Now, saith the Holy Ghost, all this is sown for the righteous. Does the husbandman, after he casts his seed into the earth, immediately think that the next day, the next week, it will be harvest? Does he think to reap as soon as he has sown? Or does he immediately say, I have labored in vain, here is no return, I will pull up the hedge of this field and lay it waste; or, I see a little grass in the blade, but no corn, I will give it to the beasts to devour it? No, his God, as the prophet speaks, instructs him to discretion, and teaches him what he must do, and how he must look for things in their season: and shall not we be instructed by him? "Behold the husbandman," saith James, "waiteth for

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the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the earlier and the latter rain." James, 5 : 7. And is light sown for them that are in darkness, and shall they stifle the seed under the clods, or spoil the tender blade that is springing up, or refuse to wait for the watering and dews of the Spirit that may bring it forth to perfection? Waiting on God is the only way to establishment and assurance. We cannot speed by our haste; yea, nothing puts the end so far away as making too much haste in our journey.

The ground is, that a sense of a special interest in forgiveness and acceptance is given to the soul by an act of sovereign grace. It is not secured by any rational conclusions or deductions that we can make. The peace and rest sought for come from mere prerogative. "When he giveth quietness, who can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who can behold him?" Job, 34 : 29. Does not the nature of the thing require humble waiting on God? If, then, either impatience cast the soul into frowardness, or weariness make it slothful, which are the two ways whereby waiting is ruined, let not such an one expect any comfortable issue of his contending for deliverance out of his depths. Men may indulge their own reasonings, may lay down propositions apparently ever so conclusive, and yet be far enough from that sweet consolation, joy and assurance which God alone can give. Yea, a man may sometimes gather up consolation to himself upon such terms, but it will not abide. David, Psalm 30 : 6, 7, argued that his mountain was made strong, and he should never be moved. But in the midst of these pleasing thoughts God hides his face, and he is troubled;

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he cannot any longer draw out the sweetness of the conclusion mentioned. It was in him before from the shining of God's countenance, and not from any arguings of his own.

No disappointment, then, no tediousness or weariness should make the soul leave off waiting on God, if it intend to attain consolation and establishment. So it was with the church: "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope." Lam. 3:21. What is it that she calls to mind? This, "that it is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." verse 22. I will yet hope, I will yet continue in my expectation, on account of never-failing compassion, of endless mercies in him, whatever my present condition be. And thence she makes a blessed conclusion, "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." verse 26. This is our third rule. It is good to hope and wait, whatever our present condition be, and not to give over, if we would not be sure to fail; a duty on which the close of this psalm insists, and which will be further considered.

Rule IV. *Remove the hinderances of believing by a searching out of sin.*

Let the soul that would attain to establishment and consolation in believing and obedience, make thorough work in the search of sin, even to the sins of youth, that all scores on that account may clearly be wiped out. If there be much rubbish left in the foundation of the building, no wonder if it always shake and totter. Men's leaving any sin unsearched to the bottom, will poison all their consolation. David knew this, when, in

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dealing with God in his distresses, he prays that he would not remember the sins and transgressions of his youth. Psalm 25 : 7. Youth is often a time of great vanity and unmindfulness of God; many stains and spots are therein usually brought upon the consciences of men. "Childhood and youth are vanity," Eccl. 11 : 10, not merely because they soon pass away, but because they are usually spent in vanity: so the advice in the next verse to remember God in those days indicates. chap. 12 : 1. The way of many is to put such things out of mind, not to walk in a sense of their folly and madness, and never to make a thorough work with God about them. I speak of the saints themselves; for with others that live under the means of grace, whom God intends any way to make useful in their generation, this is the usual course: by convictions, restraining grace, afflictions, love of employment and repute, God gives them another heart than they had for a season; another heart, but not a new heart. Hence another course of life, another profession, other actions than formerly do flow; with this change they content themselves; they look on what is past perhaps with delight, or as those things fit enough for those days, but not for those they have attained to. Here they rest, and therefore never come to rest.

But I speak of the saints themselves, who make not such thorough, full, close work in this respect as they ought. An after-reckoning may come in to their own disturbance, and an unconquerable hinderance of their peace. So was it with Job, chap. 13 : 26. "He makes me to possess the iniquities of my youth." God filled his heart, his thoughts, his mind with these sins; made

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them abide with him, so that he possessed them; they were always present with him: he made the sins of his youth the sufferings of his age. And it is a sad thing, as one speaks, when young sins and old bones meet together; as Zophar, "His bones are full of the sin of his youth." Job, 20: 11. The joyous frame of some men's youth makes way for sad work in their age. Take heed, ye who are young: you are doing that which will abide with you to age, if not to eternity. This possession of the sins of youth Job calls the writing of bitter things against him; as indeed it is impossible but that sin should be bitter one time or other. God calls it a "root that beareth gall and wormwood." Deut. 29: 18. "A root of bitterness, springing up unto defilement." Heb. 12: 15. This, then, is to be searched out to the bottom. Israel will not have success nor peace whilst there is an Achan in the camp; neither success in temptation nor consolation in believing is to be expected whilst any sin unrepented lies in the conscience.

Let them who would seriously accomplish a diligent search in this matter, which is of such importance to them, take these two directions. 1. Let them go over the consideration of those sins, and others of the like nature, which may be reduced to the general heads which we have laid down as the sins which generally cast men into depths and entanglements. And if they find they have contracted the guilt of any of them, let them not think it strange that they are yet bewildered in their condition, and come short of a refreshing sense of peace with God, or an interest in forgiveness; rather let them admire the riches of his grace and forbearance

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that they are not cast utterly out of all hope of a recovery. And, 2. Let them review the course of their lives under such heads and seasons as may give them clear and distinct apprehension of what has occurred between God and their souls, that may have been provoking to him. As,

1 For the state of their *inward* man, let them consider the *unregenerate* part of their lives, that which was confessedly so before they had any real work of God upon their hearts, and therein inquire, 1. If there were then any great and signal eruptions of sins against God; for of such God requires that a deep sense be kept on our souls all our days. How often do we find Paul calling over the sins of his life and ways before his conversion! "I was," saith he, "injurious, and a blasphemer." Such reflections ought persons to have on any great provoking occasions of sin, that may keep them humble, and necessitate them constantly to look for a fresh sense of pardon, through the blood of Christ. If such sins lie neglected, and are not duly regarded and repented of, they will weaken the soul in its comfort whilst it lives in this world. 2. If there were any signal manifestations of the love of God to the soul, while it broke off from the power of its corruption and temptation, they require a due humbling consideration all our days.

In that part of our lives which, upon the call of God, we have *given up to him*, there are two sorts of sins that do effectually hinder our future peace and comfort, which ought to be frequently reviewed and issued in the blood of Christ. 1. Such as, by reason of any aggravating circumstances, have been accompanied with some

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special unkindness towards God. Such are sins after warnings and communications of a sense of love, after particular engagements against them, relapses and omissions of great opportunities and advantages for the furtherance of the glory of God in the world. These kinds of sins have much unkindness attending them, and will be searched out, if we cover them. 2. Sins attended with scandal towards any one or more persons, who may be concerned with us. The aggravation of these kinds of sins is usually allowed.

2. The various outward states which we have passed through, as of prosperity and affliction, should, in like manner, come under this search and consideration. It is but seldom that we fill up our duty, or answer the mind of God in any dispensation of providence; and if our neglect herein be not properly considered, it will undoubtedly hinder and interrupt our peace.

CHAPTER XIV.

RULES FOR OBTAINING FORGIVENESS—*continued.*

RULE V. *Distinguish between Unbelief and Jealousy.*

There is a twofold *unbelief*. 1. That which is universal and privative, such as is in all unregenerate persons; they have no faith at all: that is, they are dead, and have no principle of spiritual life. This I speak not of; it is easily distinguished from every grace, being

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the utter enemy and privation, as it were, of all grace. 2. There is an unbelief, partial and negative, consisting in a staggering at, or questioning of *the promises*. This is displeasing to God, a sin which is attended with unknown aggravations, though men usually indulge it in themselves. It is well expressed, Psalm 78 : 19, 20. God had promised his presence to the people in the wilderness, to feed, sustain, and preserve them. How did they entertain these promises of God? "Can he," say they, "give bread? Can he give flesh unto his people?" What great sin or offence in this inquiry? Why, ver. 19, this is called speaking against God: "They spake against God; they said, Can he furnish a table in the wilderness?" Unbelief, in questioning the promises, is a speaking against God, a limiting of the Holy One of Israel, as it is called, ver. 41; an assigning bounds to his goodness, power, and grace, according to what we find in ourselves; which he abhors. By this unbelief we make God like ourselves; that is, our limiting him, expecting no more from him than either we can do, or see how it may be done. This, you will say, was a great sin in the Israelites, because they had no reason to doubt or question the promises of God. But when they were so many thousand families that had not one bit of bread nor drop of water beforehand for themselves and their little ones, there is no doubt but they thought themselves to have as good reason to question the promises as any of you can think that you have. We are ready to suppose that we have all the reasons in the world, every one supposes he has those more cogent than any other has, to question the promises of grace, pardon, and forgiveness: and therefore the

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questioning of them they think is not their sin, but their duty. But pretend what we will, this is speaking against God, limiting him, and keeping ourselves from steadfastness and comfort.

But there may be *a jealousy* in a gracious heart concerning the love of Christ, which is acceptable to him, at least which he is tender towards, that may be mistaken for this questioning of the promises by unbelief, and so help to keep the soul in darkness. Love is the root; but yet it bears fruit which is bitter, though it be wholesome; which fills the soul with great perplexities, and makes it cry out for a nearer and more secure admission into the presence of Christ: "Set me," saith the spouse, "as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm, for jealousy is cruel as the grave." I cannot bear this distance from thee, these fears of my being disregarded by thee: "Set me as a seal on thy heart."

Now, this spiritual jealousy is the solicitude of the mind of a believer, who has a sincere love for Christ, as to the good will of Christ towards it, arising from a consciousness of its own unworthiness to be beloved, or accepted by him. All causeless jealousy arises from a secret sense and conviction of unworthiness, and a high esteem of him that is the object of it. So it is with this spiritual jealousy; the root of it is love, sincere love, that cannot be quenched by waters nor drowned by floods, ver. 7, which nothing can utterly prevail against. This gives the soul high thoughts of the glorious excellences of Christ, fills it with admiration of him; and these are mixed with a due sense of its own baseness, vileness, and unworthiness to be owned by him, or accepted with him. Now, if these

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thoughts, on the one hand and on the other, be not guided aright by faith, which alone can show the soul how the glory of Christ consists principally in this, that he, being so excellent and glorious, is pleased to love us with love inexpressible, who are vile and sinful; questionings about the love of Christ, and those attended with much anxiety of mind, will arise. Now, this frame may sometimes be taken for questioning the promises of God, and that be regarded as a defect in faith which is an excess of love, or is, at most, such an irregular acting of it as the Lord Christ will be very tender towards, and which is consistent with peace and a due sense of the forgiveness of sins. Mistake not, then, these, one for another, lest much causeless unquietness ensue in the judgment which you are to make of yourselves.

But you will say, *How shall we distinguish between this unbelief and jealousy*, so as not causelessly to be disquieted and perplexed? I answer briefly,

1. Unbelief, working in the questioning of the promises of God, is *weakening*, *disheartening*, *dispiriting*. It hinders the soul in spiritual duties, and weakens it both as to delight and strength. The more any one questions the promises of God, the less life, power, joy and delight in obedience he has. For faith is the spring and root of all other graces; and, according as it thrives or abates, so do they all. Men think sometimes that their uncertainty of the love of God, and of acceptance with him by the forgiveness of sin, urges them to the performance of many duties, as they can have no rest or peace in the omission of them. It may be it is so; yea, this is the state and condition with many. But what are

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these duties? and how are they performed? and what is their acceptance with God? The duties themselves are *legal* both in the principle whence they proceed and the end to which they are used. Their principle is legal fear, and their end is legal righteousness; the whole attendance on them is a seeking of righteousness as it were by the works of the law; and how are they performed? Plainly with a bondage of spirit; without love, joy, liberty, or delight; their aim is to quiet conscience, to pacify God; all in opposition to the blood and righteousness of Christ. And are they accepted with God? Let them be multiplied ever so much, he every where testifies that they are abhorred by him. All questioning of the promises weakens and discourages the soul, and makes all gospel-obedience wearisome and burdensome.

But the jealousy that is exercised about the person and love of Christ to the soul is quite of another nature, and produces other effects. It cheers, enlivens and enlarges the soul; stirs up to activity, earnestness and industry in its inquiries and desires after Christ. "Jealousy," saith the spouse, "is cruel as the grave;" therefore "set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm." It makes the soul pant after nearer and more assured communion with Christ; it stirs up vigorous and active spirits in all its duties. Every doubt and fear it generates within concerning the love of Christ stirs up the soul to more earnestness after him, delight in him, and sedulous watching against every thing that may keep it at a distance from him, or occasion him to hide, withdraw, or absent himself from it.

2. Unbelief, that works by questioning the promises, is universally *selfish;* it begins and ends in self. Self-

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love, in desires after freedom from guilt, danger and punishment is the life and soul of it. If this end be attained it is enough. It has no delight in God; nor doth it care what way it be attained, so it may be attained. Many such persons have persuasions that they shall be freed from death and hell—be it by the works of the law, or by the observance of any inventions of their own—they are not solicitous whether or not any glory arises to God from his grace and faithfulness.

The jealousy we speak of has the person of Christ and his excellency for its constant object. These fill the mind in many and various thoughts, still representing him more and more amiable and desirable to the soul. So doth the spouse, upon the like occasion, as you may see at large, Cant. 5 : 9–16. Being at some loss for his presence, (for he had withdrawn himself,) not finding her wonted communion and intercourse with him; fearing that, upon her provocation, she might forfeit her interest in his love, she turns to the consideration of all his excellences, and thereby the more inflames herself unto desires after his company and enjoyment.

Rule VI. *Distinguish between faith and spiritual sense.*

This rule the apostle gives us, "We walk by faith, not by sight." 2 Cor. 5 : 7. It is the sight of glory that is especially here intended. But faith and sense, in any kind, are clearly distinguished: that may be "believed" which is not "felt;" yea, it is the will and command of God that faith should stand and do its work where all sense fails. Isa. 50 : 10. And it is with spiritual sense in

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this matter as it is with natural. Thomas would not believe unless he saw the object of his faith with his eyes or felt it with his hand; but, saith our Savior, "Blessed are they who believe and have not seen;" who believe upon the testimony of God without the help of their own sense or reason. And if we will believe no more of God, of his love and grace, and of our acceptance with him, than we have a spiritual affecting sense of, we shall be many times at a loss. Sensible impressions from God's love are great springs of joy; but they are not absolutely necessary to peace, nor to an evidence that we believe.

We deal thus with the vilest person living; we believe him whilst we have the certainty of our sense to secure us. And if we deal so with God, what is there in our so doing praiseworthy? The prophet tells us what it is to believe in respect of providence. Hab. 3: 17. When there is nothing left outward and visible to support us, then to rest quietly on God, that is to believe. So Psalm 73: 26. And the apostle, in the example of Abraham, shows us what it is to believe with respect to a special promise: "Against hope he believed in hope." Rom. 4: 18. When he saw no outward ordinary means for the accomplishment of the promise, when innumerable objections arose against any such hope as might have respect to such means, yet he resolved all his thoughts into the faithfulness of God in the promise, and therein raised a new hope in its accomplishment; so in hope believing against hope.

It is necessary that you observe what I intend by this spiritual sense, which you must learn to distinguish from faith; and to know that true faith, interesting the

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soul in forgiveness, may be without it, that so you may not conclude there is a real want of pardon, from the want of the refreshing sense of it.

Grace in general may be referred to under two heads: 1. Our acceptance with God, or the forgiveness of sin, through Christ; and, 2d. The grace of sanctification from God in Christ. Of each of these there is a spiritual sense or experience to be obtained; in both distinguished from faith that gives us a real interest in forgiveness.

Of the spiritual sense that we have of acceptance with God there are sundry parts or degrees: to this belongs peace with God, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Rom. 5 : 1. This peace is the rest and composure of the soul emerging out of trouble on account of the reconciliation made for it by the blood of Christ: it implies a freedom from trouble, and a rest, satisfaction and contentment in the condition attained. And this, at least the second part of it, belongs to the spiritual sense that we inquire after. Again, there is in it joy in the Holy Ghost, called "joy unspeakable and full of glory," 1 Pet. 1 : 8; as also "glorying in the Lord" on account of his grace, Isa. 45 : 25, with many like effects proceeding from a shedding abroad of the love of God in our hearts. Rom. 5 : 5.

Yea, you say these are the things you aim at; these are the things you would attain, and be filled with. It is this peace, this joy, this glorying in the Lord that you would always be in possession of. I say, you do well to desire them, to seek and labor for them; they are purchased by Christ for believers; but you will do well to consider *under what notion* you desire them. If you look on these things as belonging to the essence

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of faith, without which you can have no real interest in forgiveness or acceptance with God, you greatly deceive your own soul, and put yourself out of the way of obtaining them. These things are not believing, nor adequate effects of it, so as immediately to be produced wherever faith is; but they are such consequences of it as may or may not ensue, according to the will of God. Faith is a seed that contains them virtually; and out of which they may be, in due time, educed by the working of the word and Spirit. And the way for any soul to be made partaker of them is to wait on the sovereignty of God's grace, who createth peace in the exercise of faith upon the promises. He then that would place believing in these things, and will not be persuaded that he doth believe until he is possessed of them, both loses the benefit and comfort of what he has; and, neglecting the due acting of faith, puts himself out of the way of attaining what he aims at.

These things, therefore, are not needful to give you a real saving interest in forgiveness, as it is tendered in the promises of the Gospel by the blood of Christ. And, it may be, it is not the will of God that ever you should be entrusted with them. It may be, it would not be for your advantage so to be. Some servants must have their wages kept for them to the year's end, or it will do them no good. It may be, some persons would be such spendthrifts of satisfying peace and joy, and be so diverted by them from attending to some necessary duties, as humiliation, mortification, and self-abasement, without which their souls cannot live, that it would not be much to their advantage to be intrusted with them. It is from the same Divine care and love that peace and

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joy are detained from some believers and granted to others.

You are, therefore, to receive forgiveness by a pure act of believing, in the way already described; and are not to think it is not in you, unless you have constantly a spiritual sense of it in your heart. See, in the mean time, that your faith bringeth forth obedience, and God, in due time, will cause it to bring forth peace.

Much the same may be said concerning the grace we have from God in Christ for our *sanctification*. When the soul cannot find this in itself, when it has not a spiritual sense and experience of its power, when it cannot evidently distinguish it from that which is not right or genuine, it is filled with fears and perplexities, and thinks it is yet in its sins. He is so indeed who hath no grace in him; but not he always who can find none in him: these are different things. A man may have grace, and yet not have it at some times much acting; he may have grace for life, when he has it not for fruitfulness and comfort, though it be his duty so to have it. Rev. 3 : 2; 2 Tim. 1 : 6. And a man may have grace acting in him, and yet not know, not be sensible that he has acting grace. We see persons frequently under great apprehension that they have no grace at all, who yet, at the same time, to the clearest conviction of all who are able to discern spiritual things, sweetly and genuinely act faith, love, submission to God, and that in a high and eminent manner. Psalm 88. The Psalmist complains that he was free among the dead, a man of no strength, ver. 4, 5, as one who had no spiritual life, no grace. This afflicted his mind, and almost distracted him, ver. 15; and yet there can be no greater expres-

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sions of faith and love to God than are mixed with his complaints.

These things, I say then, are not to be judged of by spiritual sense; but we are to live by faith about them. And no soul ought to conclude, that because it has not the one, it has not the other; that because it has not joy and peace, it has no interest in pardon and forgiveness.

Rule VII. *Mix not foundation and building-work together.*

Our foundation in dealing with God is Christ alone, mere grace and pardon in him. Our building is by holiness and obedience, as the fruits of that faith by which we have received the atonement. And great mistakes there are in this matter, which bring great entanglements on the souls of men. Some are all their days laying the foundation, and are never able to build upon it any comfort to themselves or usefulness to others; and the reason is, because they will be mixing with the foundation stones that are fit only for the building. They will be bringing their obedience, duties, mortification of sin, and the like, to the foundation. These are precious stones to build with, but unmeet to be first laid, to bear upon them the whole weight of the building. The foundation is to be laid, as was said, in mere grace, mercy, pardon in the blood of Christ. This the soul is to accept of, and to rest in as mere grace, without the consideration of any thing in itself, but that it is sinful and obnoxious to ruin. This it finds a difficulty in, and would gladly have something of its own to mix with it. It cannot tell how to fix these foundation-stones without some cement of its own endeavors and duties;

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and because these will not mix, they spend a fruitless labor about it all their days. But if the foundation be of grace, it is not at all of works; for otherwise grace is no more grace. If any thing of our own be mixed with grace in this matter, it utterly destroys the nature of grace; which, if it be not alone, does not exist at all.

But does not this tend to licentiousness? does not this render obedience, holiness, duties, mortification of sin and good works needless? God forbid! yea, this is the only way to order them aright to the glory of God. Have we nothing to do but to lay the foundation? Yes, all our days we are to build upon it, when it is surely and firmly laid; and these are the ways and means of our edification.

This, then, is the soul to do who would come to peace with God. Let it let go all former endeavors, if it has been engaged to any of that kind; and let it alone receive and adhere to mere grace, mercy and pardon, with a full sense that in itself it has nothing for which it should have an interest in them, but that all is of mere grace, through Jesus Christ: "Other foundation can no man lay." Depart not hence until this work be well done. Cease not from an earnest endeavor with your own heart to acquiesce in this righteousness of God, and to bring your soul to a comfortable persuasion that God, for Christ's sake, hath freely forgiven you all your sins. Stir not hence until this be effected. If you have been engaged in another way, that is, to seek for an interest in the pardon of sin by some endeavors of your own, it is likely that you are filled with the fruit of your own doings; that is, that you go on with all kinds of uncertainties, and without any constant peace. Return,

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do not so in worldly things: you take an industrious course for a remedy, or for relief, and do not content yourselves with wishing and complaining. You deceive yourselves by acting as though industry in the use of natural means, for the attaining of natural ends, were the ordinance of God, and as if diligence in the use of spiritual means, for the obtaining of spiritual ends, were not so.

Do not consult your own hearts only. What is it that the Scripture calls for in your condition? Is it not industry and activity of spirit? And what does the nature of the thing require? Distress that you hope yet to conquer evidently calls for diligence in the use of means for deliverance. If you are past hope, it avails not to complain; if you are not, why give up yourselves to despondence? Our Savior tells us, that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Matt. 11 : 12. It is not of the outward violence of its enemies seeking to destroy it that our Savior speaks, but of the spiritual fervency and ardency of mind that is in those who intend to be partakers of it. "The kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it:" pressing into it, and taking it by force, are the same thing. There is then a violence, a restless activity and vigor of spirit to be exercised for an interest in this kingdom. Apply this to your condition. Are you in depths and doubts, staggering and uncertain, not knowing what is your condition, nor whether you have any interest in the forgiveness that is with God? Are you tossed up and down between hopes and fears, wanting peace, consolation, and establishment? Why lie you upon your face? Get up, watch, pray, fast,

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meditate, resist temptation to sin; press to the throne of grace by prayer, earnest and importunate supplication: this is the way to take the kingdom of heaven. These things are not peace, they are not assurance; but they are part of the means that God has appointed for the attainment of them.

What, then, is the peculiar instruction proper for souls in this condition? Plainly this of the apostle, "Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure." 2 Pet. 1 : 10. "Alas!" says the soul, "I am afflicted and tossed, and not comforted; my heart will come to no stability; I have no assurance, I know not whether I am chosen or called; yea, fear that my latter end will be darkness and sorrow: there is, I confess, forgiveness with God, but I justly fear that I shall never be made partaker of it." What is the usual course taken by those applied to for instruction, in such circumstances? Mostly they have a good opinion of those who come with these complaints: they judge them to be godly, though much in the dark; if they knew them not before, yet upon hearing these complaints they begin to be well persuaded of them. Hereupon they are moved with pity and compassion, and troubled to see their perplexities, and set themselves to tender relief: they remind them of the gracious promises of the Gospel; it may be, fix upon some particular promise, which they explain: thence they remind them of the abundant grace and tender love of the Father, of the merciful care of our High Priest, his readiness and ability to save, and his communication of such favors to them as they perceive not. By such ways they seek to give them relief. But what is the issue?

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Does not this relief prove, for the most part, like the morning cloud and the early dew? a little refreshment, it may be, it yields for a season, but it is quickly again dried up, and the soul left in its heartless withering condition.

You will say then, do you condemn this manner of proceeding with the souls of men in their doubts, fears, and distresses? Would you have them pine away under the sense of their condition, or abide in this uncertainty all their days? I answer, I would not have any left comfortless in their depths; but yet I would give these two cautions.

1. That *spiritual wisdom* is greatly required in administering consolation to distressed souls. If in any thing the tongue of the spiritually learned is required, it is here; namely, in speaking a word in season to them that are weary. A promiscuous imparting of gospel-consolation, without a previous right judgment concerning the true state of the soul, is seldom useful, often pernicious. And let men take care how they commit their souls and consciences to *spiritual advisers* who have good words in readiness for all-comers.

2. If counsel and consolation of this kind be given, *distinct from the advice to watchfulness*, diligence, spiritual violence in a way of duty, it is exceedingly dangerous, and will assuredly prove useless. Let us see what counsel the Holy Ghost gives to those who would make their calling and election sure, who would be freed from their present fears and uncertainties, who complain of their darkness and dangers: "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, knowledge," &c. 2 Pet. 1 : 5. "For," saith he, "if you do these things, an entrance

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shall be administered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." ver 11. You who are now on the borders of that kingdom, who know not whether you belong to it or not, you shall have an entrance into the kingdom of Christ; and all the joy, consolation and glory of it shall be richly administered to you. This is the advice that the Holy Ghost gives in this case; and this is the blessed promise annexed to following this advice: and this is not to be separated from the former compassionate course of administering consolation.

But you will, it may be, here say, "We are so dead and dull, so chained under the power of corruptions and temptations, that we are not able thus to put forth the fruit of a spiritual life in adding one grace to another." But do you use diligence, study, endeavor—all diligence, diligence at all times, in all ways by God appointed, all manner of diligence within and without, in private and public, to this end? Do you study, meditate, pray, watch, fast, neglect no opportunity, keep your hearts, search, try, examine yourselves, fly temptations and occasions of deadening and stifling grace? Do these things abound in you? "Alas!" you say, "you cannot do thus, you are so weak, so indisposed." But, alas! you will not, you will not part with your ease, you will not crucify your lusts, you will not use all diligence; but you must come to it, or be contented to spend all your days in darkness, and lie down in sorrow.

By such neglect do many fail of heaven. Do not many bewail the folly of their nature and ways in the morning and evening, and yet scarce stand upon their

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watch any part of the day, or on any occasion of the day? Is this giving all diligence? Is this working out our salvation with fear and trembling? May we not even see professors indulging themselves in sloth, vanity, folly, wrath and envy, and yet complaining what loss they are at, how unquiet, how uncertain? God forbid it should be thus with you; or that we should endeavor to speak peace to you in any such frame. To hear of a person, that he walks slothfully, carelessly, or indulges his corruptions, and to find him complaining that he is at a loss whether he have any interest in pardon or not, and to tender comfort to such mourners, without a due admonition of their duty to be diligent in the use of means for their delivery out of their condition, is to tender poison to them.

To this, then, the soul must come that is in depths, if it intend to be delivered. Heartless complaints, with excuses to keep it from vigorous spiritual diligence, must be laid aside; if not, ordinarily, peace, rest and stability will not be obtained. A great example of this we have in Cantieles, 5 : 2–8, which see. Spiritual peace and sloth will never dwell together in the same soul and conscience.

Rule IX. *Take heed of undue expressions concerning God and his ways, in distress.*

In doubts, distresses, and perplexities beware of hard thoughts of God, hasty unweighed expressions concerning him or his ways, or of secret resolves that it were as well to give over waiting on him, as continue in the state wherein you are, seeing your condition is remediless.

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On three occasions are such thoughts apt to arise in the minds of men, which sometimes break forth into unwarrantable expressions concerning God himself and his ways.

1. In deep perplexities of mind, by reason of some pressing terror from the Lord.

2. On the long wearisome continuance of some tempting distress, of which there are many examples.

3. In spiritual disappointments through the strength of temptation. When a person has, it may be, recovered himself, through grace, from a perplexing sense of the guilt of some sin, or from a course, shorter or longer, less or greater, of backsliding and negligent walking with God, and goes on cheerfully for a season in the course of obedience; if, through the power of temptation, neglect of watchfulness, or by any other means, he is surprised in the sins or ways he had relinquished, or is turned aside from the vigor of the course he had pursued, he may be exposed, not only to great despondency, but to be overtaken with secret resolves to give over contending, feeling that it is to no purpose, and that God regards him not at all.

Take an instance or two of each kind.

The first we have in Job, in the extremity of his trials and terrors from the Lord. See, among other places, chap. 10. ver. 3. "Is it," saith he to God, "good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thy hands?" Ah! poor worms, with whom have we to do? Who shall say to a king, "Thou art wicked, and to princes, ye are ungodly?" And will ye speak so to him who respecteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth them more than the

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poorest in the earth? And see what conclusions he infers from such thoughts as these, "Thou numberest my steps, dost thou not watch over my sin? my transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity." chap. 14 : 15–17. He chargeth God as his enemy, one who watcheth for all opportunities and advantages against him, who seemeth to be glad at his halting, and taketh care that none of his sins should be missing when he intended to deal with him. Had this indeed been the case with him, he had perished unto eternity, as elsewhere he acknowledged.

Of the other we have an instance in the church, "I said, my strength and my hope is perished from the Lord." Lam. 3 : 18. Present grace in spiritual strength, and future expectation of mercy, are all gone. And what is got by this? Secret hard thoughts of God himself: "When I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer." ver. 8. "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayers should not pass through." ver. 44. These things are grievous to God to bear, and no way useful to the soul in its condition. Yea, they more and more unfit it for every duty that may tend to its relief and deliverance.

So it was with Jonah: "I said, I am cast out of thy sight." chap. 2 : 4. All is lost and gone with me: as good give over as contend: I do but labor in vain, perish I must, as one cast out of the sight of God. Similar complaints fell also from the Psalmist in his distress. Psalm 88.

The general, who heard one of his soldiers cry out upon a fresh onset of the enemy, "Now we are undone! Now we are ruined!" called him a traitor, and told him

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it was not so whilst he could wield his sword. It is not for every private soldier, on every danger, to form a judgment of the battle; that is the work of the general. Jesus Christ is the captain of our salvation: he has undertaken the conduct of our souls through all our difficulties. Our duty is to fight and contend: his work is to take care of the event; and to him it is to be committed.

That then you may make a due use of this rule, keep always in mind these two considerations:

1. That it is not for you to take *the judgment of Christ* out of his hand, and to be passing sentence upon your own soul. Judgment, as to the state and condition of men, is committed to Christ; and to him it is to be left. This we were directed to in our first rule, and it is of special use in the case under consideration. Self-judging, in reference to sin and the demerit of it, is our duty. The judging of our state in relation to the remedy provided, is the office and work of Jesus Christ.

2. Consider that hard thoughts as to what God will do with you, and harsh desponding sentences pronounced against yourselves, will *insensibly alienate your hearts* from God. It may be, when men's perplexities are at their height, and the most sad expressions are, as it were, wrested from them, they yet think they must justify God, and that they do so accordingly. But yet such thoughts as those mentioned are very apt to infect the mind with other inclinations; for, after a while they will prevail with the soul to look on God as an enemy, and the consequence is easily discerned. Suffer not, then, your mind to be tainted with such thoughts, and let not God be dishonored by any such expressions as

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reflect on that infinite grace and compassion which he is exercising towards you.

RULE X. *Duly improve the least appearances of God, in a way of grace or pardon.*

If you would come to stability and a comforting persuasion of an interest in forgiveness by the blood of Christ, improve the least appearance of him to your soul, and the least intimations of his love in pardon that in his compassion are made to you. The spouse takes notice of her husband and rejoices in him when he stands behind the wall, when he doth but look forth at the window and show himself at the lattice, when she could have no clear sight of him. Cant. 2 : 9. She lays hold on the least appearance of him to support her heart with and to stir up her affections towards him. Men in danger do not sit still to wait until something presents itself that will give assured deliverance, but seize upon what first presents itself. God in many places expresses such supports as give the soul little more than a possibility of attaining the end: as, "It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." Zeph. 2 : 3. And "Who knoweth but he will return and leave a blessing?" Joel, 2 : 14. It may be we shall be hid; it may be we shall have a blessing. And this was the best ground that Jonathan had for the great undertaking against the enemies of God, "It may be that the Lord will work for us." 1 Sam. 14 : 6. And to what end does God at any time make these seemingly doubtful intimations of grace and mercy? Is it that we should, by the difficulty included in them, be discouraged and kept from him?

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Not at all. He speaks nothing to deter sinners, especially distressed sinners, from trusting in him. But his design is, that we should lay hold upon the least appearance of grace which this kind of expressions gives us. When men are in a storm at sea, which they fear will at last prevail against them; if they make so far a discovery of land as that they can say, It may be there is land, it may be it is such a place, where there is a safe harbor, none can positively say it is not, there lies no demonstration against it: in this condition, especial ly if there be no other way of escape or safety, this is enough to make them pursue that discovery, and with all diligence steer their course that way, until they have made a trial of it to the utmost. The soul of which we speak is afflicted and tossed, and not comforted. There is in the intimation of grace and pardon intended a remote discovery of some relief. "This may be Christ, it may be forgiveness." This is enough to incline it to direct its course constantly that way; to press forward to that harbor which will give it rest. How little had David to compose his soul in his great distress: "If," said he, "I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again and show me the ark and the place of his habitation; but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold, here am I, let him do unto me as seemeth good to him." 2 Sam. 15 : 25, 26. He hath nothing but sovereign grace to rest upon, and to that he gives himself up.

Faith is indeed the soul's venture for eternity. Something it must venture on, as to its eternal condition. It must either adhere to itself, and vain hopes of a righteousness of its own; or it must give over all expecta-

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tion, and lie down in darkness; or it must shut out all dreadful apprehensions of eternity by the power of its lusts and carnal affections; or it must, whatever its discouragements be, cast itself upon pardon in the blood of Jesus Christ. Now, if all the former ways be detestable and pernicious, if the best of them be a direct opposition to the Gospel, what has the soul to do but to exercise faith, and to improve every encouragement, even the least, to that purpose.

CHAPTER XV.

HINDERANCES TO A SENSE OF FORGIVENESS.—AFFLICTIONS.

Having given some rules for obtaining gospel-peace, I proceed to notice, as the second general application of our subject, some HINDERANCES to a sense of forgiveness. Consider, in particular, where the stress and hinderance lies that keeps you from peace through an established persuasion of an interest in evangelical pardon. Do not always fluctuate up and down in generals and uncertainties; but fix on the distinct obstacle, that it may be tried whether it be sufficient to keep you in your present entanglements and despondencies. Search out your wound, that it may be tried whether it be curable or not. To help you herein, I shall mention some general heads, to which most of the objections that distressed sinners make against their own peace

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may be reduced; and leave the light of them to be applied in particular to the relief of the souls of men, as God shall be pleased to make them effectual.

And, first, such disquiet and objections against the peace of the soul and its acceptance with God, will arise from AFFLICTIONS: they have occasioned this disquiet of old, they do so in many at this day. Afflictions. I say, often deeply affect the mind, and sometimes prevail to darken it so far as to generate thoughts that they are all messengers of wrath, all tokens of displeasure; and consequently, evidences that we are not pardoned or accepted with God.

The present is to many a time of great affliction. Some have met with a dreadful surprisal in things not looked for, such as do not occur in the providence of God in many generations. Such is the condition of those who are reduced to the utmost extremity by the late consuming fire;* some have had their whole families, all their posterity, taken from them; in a few days they have been bereaved, as in the plague.† Some in their own persons, or in their relations, have had sore, long, and grievous trials from oppression and persecution; and these things have various effects on the minds of men. Some we find crying with that wicked king, "This evil is of the Lord, why should we wait any longer for him?" and giving up themselves to seek relief from their own lusts. Some bear up under their

* By the fire of London in 1666, 13,200 houses were destroyed, and many families utterly ruined; but few lives were lost.

† In the plague of London, A. D. 1665, 68,000 persons died.

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troubles with a natural stoutness of spirit; and some have received a sanctified improvement of the trials, with joy in the Lord. But many, we find, go heavily under their burdens, having their minds darkened with misapprehensions of the love of God and of their own personal interest in his grace. It is not, therefore, unseasonable to dwell a little on this point.

OUTWARD TROUBLES are often the occasions, if not the causes, of great inward distresses. You know how the saints of old expressed their sense of them and conflicts with them. The complaints of David are familiar to all who attend to any communion with God in these things; so are those of Job, Jonah, Jeremiah, and others: neither do they complain merely of their troubles, but of the sense which they had of God's displeasure in them, and of his hiding his face from them whilst they were so exercised.

So it is now with many. Says one, "I am rolled from one trial to another; the clouds with me still return after the rain. All the billows and water-spouts of God go over me: in my person, it may be, pressed with sickness, pains, and troubles; in my relations, with their sins, miscarriages, or death; in my outward state, losses, and reputation, I am even a withered branch. Surely, if God had any special regard to my soul, it would not be thus with me; or some timely end would have been put to these dispensations." On the other hand, they take a view of some other professors: they see that their tables are spread day by day; that the candle of the Lord shines continually on their tabernacle, and it seems that in all things they have their hearts' desire. Except the common evils of human na-

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ture, nothing befalls them grievous in the world. Thus it is with them: "And surely, had I an interest in his grace, in pardon, the God of Israel would not thus pursue a flea in the mountains, nor set himself in battle-array against a leaf driven to and fro with the wind; he would spare me a little, and let me alone for a moment; but as things are with me, I fear my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God." Such thoughts perplex the minds of men, and keep them from partaking of that strong consolation which God is abundantly willing they should receive, by a comfortable persuasion of a blessed interest in his forgiveness.

This was the very case of David; or at least these outward troubles were a special part of those depths, out of which he cried for relief, by a sense of pardon, grace, and redemption with God.

I answer to these complaints, That so many excellent things are spoken concerning the benefits of afflictions, such blessed ends are assigned to them, which to many have been fulfilled, that a man unacquainted with the effects by which they are often attended would think it impossible any one should be shaken as to the love and favor of God on their account. But, the apostle tells us that no afflictions are joyous at present, but grievous; and while Job made, in the close of his trials, the solemn profession that it was good for him that he had been afflicted, yet we know how he was distressed under them. There are therefore various accidental things which accompany great afflictions, that seem to exempt them from the common rule, and the promise of love and grace: as,

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1. *The remembrance of past sins* lies in the bosom of many afflictions. So it was with Job: "Thou makest me to possess the sins of my youth." See his plea, chap. 13 : 23–27. In the midst of his troubles and distresses, God revived upon his spirit a sense of former sins, even the sins of his youth, and made him to possess them: he filled his soul with thoughts of them, and anxiety about them. This made him fear lest God was his enemy, and would continue to deal with all severity. So was it with Joseph's brethren in their distresses; "They said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear, therefore is this distress come upon us." Gen. 42 : 21. And "Behold, his blood is required." ver. 22. Their distress revives a deep perplexing sense of the guilt of sin many years before, and that under all its aggravating circumstances, which spoiled them of their relief and comfort, filling them with confusion and trouble, though absolutely innocent as to what was come on them.

The same appeared in the widow of Zarephath, with whom Elijah sojourned during the famine. Upon the death of her son, which it seems was somewhat extraordinary, she cried out to the prophet, "What have I to do with thee, thou man of God? Art thou come to call my sins to remembrance, and to slay my son?" 1 Kings, 17 : 18. It seems, some great sin she had formerly contracted the guilt of, and now upon her sore affliction in the death of her only child, the remembrance of it was recalled and revived upon her soul. Thus deep calleth unto deep at the noise of God's wa-

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ter-spouts, and then all his waves and billows go over a person. Psalm 42:7. The deep of afflictions calleth up the deep of the guilt of sin, and both in conjunction become as billows passing over the soul. We see only the outside of men's afflictions; and it is supposed to be an easy thing to apply relief and comfort to those that are distressed. The rule in this matter is so clear, so often repeated, the promises annexed to this condition so many and precious, that every one has in readiness what to apply to those who are so exercised. But often we know nothing of the gall and wormwood that is in men's affliction; they keep that to themselves, and their souls feed upon it in secret. Lam. 3:19. God hath stirred up the remembrance of some great sin or sins, and they look upon their affliction as one in which he is come, or beginning to enter into judgment with them. And is it any wonder if they are in darkness and filled with disconsolation?

2. There is in many afflictions something that seems *new and peculiar*, with which the soul is surprised, and in which it cannot readily reduce its condition to what is taught about afflictions in general. This perplexes and entangles it. It is not affliction it is troubled with, but some one thing or other in it that appears with an especial dread to the soul, so that it questions whether ever it were so with any other, and is thereby deprived of the support which from former examples it might receive. And indeed, when God intends a deep affliction he will put an edge upon it, in matter, or manner, or circumstances, that shall make the soul feel its sharpness; he will not be governed by our bounds and measures with which we think we could be content;

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but he will put the impress of his own greatness and terror upon it, that he may be acknowledged and submitted to. Such was the state with Naomi, when, from a full and plentiful condition, she went into a strange country with a husband and two sons, where they all died, leaving her destitute and poor. Hence, in her account of God's dealing with her, she says, "Call me not Naomi," that is, pleasant, "but call me Mara," that is, bitter, "for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, since the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?" Ruth, 1:20, 21. So was it with Job, with the widow of Zarephath, and with her at Nain, who was burying her only child. And still, in many afflictions, God is pleased to add an entangling speciality which perplexes the soul, and darkens it in all its reasonings about the love of God towards it, and its interest in pardon and grace.

3. In some, the affections, as fixed on lawful things, have become very sensible and tender, and fitted to receive *very deep impressions* from great afflictions. Now, though this in itself be a good natural frame, and helps to preserve the soul from that stout-heartedness which God abhors; yet, if it be not watched over, it is apt to perplex the soul with many entangling temptations. The apostle intimates a double evil to which we are exposed in afflictions: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." Heb. 12:5. Men may either, through a natural stoutness, despise and contemn their sufferings, and be obstinate under them; or they may faint and

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despond, and so come short of the end which God designed for them to be attained in the way of duty. Now, though the frame spoken of be not obnoxious to the first extreme, yet it is greatly to the latter, which, if not watched against, is no less pernicious than the former. The affections in such persons being greatly moved, they cloud and darken the mind, and fill it with strange apprehensions concerning God and themselves. Every thing is presented to them through a glass of fear and terror. This makes them faint and despond under very sad apprehensions of themselves and their condition.

4. Afflictions find some *entangled with strong corruptions*, as love of the world, of reputation, or it may be of things carnal or sensual. Now, when great afflictions and strong corruptions unexpectedly meet, it is not conceivable what a combustion they will make in the soul. As a strong medicine encountering a powerful disease, produces effects by which sometimes the very life of the patient is endangered; so where a great trial, a smart stroke of the hand of God, falls upon a person in the midst of some earthly or sensual pursuit, the soul is amazed even to distraction, and can scarce have any thought but that God is come to cut him off in the midst of his sins. Every unmortified corruption fills the very fear and expectation of affliction with horror. And there is good reason that it should do so; for, although God should be merciful to men's iniquities, yet if he should come to take vengeance of their inventions, their condition would be dark and sorrowful indeed.

5. *Satan* is never wanting on such occasions to at-

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tempt the compassing of his ends upon persons exercised under the hand of God. In the time of suffering it was that he fell upon the Head of the church, turning it into the very hour of the power of darkness. And he will not omit any opportunity of advantage against his members. And he principally in such seasons attacks them with this: that God regards them not, that they are fallen under his judgment and severity, as those who have no share in mercy or forgiveness.

From these and similar reasons, I say it is, that whereas afflictions in general are so testified to as pledges and tokens of God's love and care, as designed to blessed ends, conformity to Christ, and a participation of the holiness of God; yet, by reason of these circumstances, they often prove the means of casting the soul into depths, and of hindering it from a refreshing interest in forgiveness with God.

That this may prove no real or abiding ground of inward spiritual trouble to the soul, the following DIRECTIONS may be observed.

1. Not only afflictions in general, but great and manifold afflictions, and those attended with all sorts of aggravating circumstances, *are always consistent with the pardon of sin*, after signal tokens and pledges of it and of the love of God therein: "What is man that thou shouldst magnify him, and that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him; and that thou shouldst visit him every morning, and try him every moment!" Job, 7: 17, 18. There are scarcely words of a more dismal import in the whole book of God; yet when Job recollected himself from his overwhelming distress, he acknow-

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ledges that all this proceeded from the love and care of God; yea, his fixing his heart upon a man to magnify him, to set him up and do him good: for this end doth he chasten a man every morning, and try him every moment; and that with such afflictions as are, for the present, so far from being joyous, that they give no rest, but even weary the soul of life. verse 15, 16. It is observed of Job, that when none in the earth was like to him in trouble, God gave him three testimonies from heaven that there was none in the earth like to him in grace. And though it may not be laid down as a general rule, yet, for the most part, in the providence of God, from the foundation of the world, those who have had most of afflictions have had most of grace, and the most eminent testimonies of acceptance with God. Christ Jesus, the Son of God, the Head of the church, had all afflictions gathered into a head in him; and yet the Father always loved him, and was well-pleased with him.

When God solemnly renewed his covenant with Abraham, and he had prepared the sacrifice whereby it was to be ratified and confirmed, God made a smoking furnace to pass between the pieces of the sacrifice. Gen. 15 : 17. It was to let him know that there was a furnace of affliction attending the covenant of grace and peace. And so he tells Zion, that he chose her in the furnace of affliction, Isaiah, 48 : 10, that is, in Egyptian affliction, burning, flaming afflictions, fiery trials, as Peter calls them 1 Pet. 4 : 12. No argument then can be drawn from affliction, from any kind of it, from any aggravating circumstance wherewith it may be attended, that should discourage the soul in its comforting,

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supporting persuasion of an interest in the love of God.

2. No *length or continuance* of afflictions ought to prevent our spiritual consolation. Take the great example of the Son of God. How long did his afflictions continue? What end was put to them? No longer did they abide than until he cried with a loud voice and gave up the ghost. To the moment of his death, from his manger to his cross, his afflictions still increased, and he ended his days in the midst of them. Now, he was the Head of the church, and the great representative of it; to a conformity with whom we are predestinated. And if God will have it so with us, even in this particular, that we shall have no rest from our trials until we lie down in the grave, that whatever condition we pass through, they shall be shut out of none, but only from immortality and glory, what have we herein to complain of?

3. Where the remembrance and perplexing sense of past sins is revived by afflictions, *separate them* in your minds, and deal distinctly about them. So long as you carry on the consideration of your sin and your affliction jointly, you will be rolled from one to another, and never obtain rest to your souls. They will mutually aggravate each other. The sharpness of affliction will add to the bitterness of the sense of sin; and the sense of sin will give an edge to affliction, and cause it to pierce deeply into the soul, as we showed in the former instances. Deal, therefore, distinctly about them, and in their proper order: so doth the Psalmist. He had both upon him, and together they brought him into the depths, from which he cries out for deliverance in Psalm 32: 3–5. And what course does he

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take? He applies himself in the first place to his sin, and the guilt of it, and that distinctly and separately. And when he had a discharge from sin, which he waited so earnestly for, his faith quickly rose above his outward trials, as appears in this blessed close of all: "he shall redeem Israel out of all his troubles," the whole Israel of God, and myself among them. This do, then: single out the sin or sins that are revived in the sense of their guilt upon the conscience; use all diligence to come to an issue about them in the blood of Christ. This God by your affliction calls you to. This is the disease of which your trouble is but the symptom. This, therefore, in the cure you seek after, is first and principally to be attended to; when that is once removed, the other, as to any prejudice to your souls, will depart of itself. The root being once digged up, you shall not long feed on the bitter fruit that it hath brought forth; or if you do, the wormwood shall be taken out of it, and it shall be very pleasant to you, as well as wholesome. How this is to be done by an application to God for forgiveness, hath been at large declared. But if men will deal with confused thoughts about their sins and troubles, their wound will be incurable, and their sorrow endless.

4. Remember that a time of affliction is a time of *temptation*. Satan, as we have showed, will not be wanting in any opportunity or advantage of setting upon the soul. When Pharaoh heard that the people were entangled in the wilderness, he pursued them. And when Satan sees a soul entangled with its distresses, he thinks it is his time and hour to assault it. He seeks to winnow, and comes when the corn is under the flail.

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Reckon, therefore, that when trouble cometh, the prince of this world cometh also, that you may be provided for him. Then is the time to take the shield of faith, that we may be able to quench his fiery darts. If they be neglected, they will inflame the soul. Watch, therefore, and pray, that you enter not into temptation, that Satan do not represent God falsely unto you. He that durst represent Job falsely to the all-seeing God, will, with much more boldness, represent God falsely to us, who see and know so little. Be not, then, ignorant of his devices; but every way set yourselves against his interposing between God and your souls in a matter which he hath nothing to do with.

5. Learn to distinguish the effect of bodily infirmity from spiritual distresses. Some have sad, dark thoughts fixed on their minds from their want of health. These will not be cured by reasonings, nor utterly quelled by faith. Our design must be to abate their efficacy and consequences, by considering their occasions. And if men cannot do this of themselves, it is highly incumbent on those who would give them relief, to be careful to discern what is from such principles, of which they are not to expect a speedy cure. And,

6. Take heed, in times of peace and ease, that you *lay not up*, by your negligence or careless walking, *sad provision* for a day of darkness, a time of afflictions. It is sin that embitters trouble; the sins of peace are revived in the time of distress. Fear of future affliction, of impending trouble, should make us careful not to bring that into them which will make them bitter and sorrowful.

7. *Labor to grow better* under all your afflictions, lest

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your afflictions grow worse; lest God mingle them with more darkness, bitterness, and terror. As Joab said to David, that if he ceased not his lamentation on the death of Absalom, all the people would leave him, and he then would find himself in a far worse condition than that which he bemoaned, or any thing that befell him from his youth; the same may be said to persons under afflictions. If they are not managed and improved in a due manner, that which is worse may, nay, in all probability, will befall them. Wherever God takes this way, and engages in afflicting, he commonly pursues his work until he hath prevailed, and his design towards the afflicted party is accomplished. He will not cease to thresh and break the bread-corn until it be meet for his use. Lay down, then, the weapons of your warfare against him; give up yourselves to his will; let go every thing about which he contends with you; follow after that to which he calls you, and you will find light arising in the midst of darkness. Hath he a cup of affliction in one hand, lift up your eyes and you will see a cup of consolation in the other. And if all stars withdraw their light, whilst you are in the way of God assure yourselves that the sun is ready to rise.

8. According to the tenor of the covenant of grace a man may be *sensible of the respect affliction has to sin*, yea, to this or that sin in particular, and yet have a comfortable persuasion of the forgiveness of sin. Thus it was in general in God's dealing with his people: "He forgave them, but he took vengeance on their inventions." Psalm 99:8. Whatever they suffered under the vengeance that fell upon their inventions, (and that is as hard a word as is applied any where to God's

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dealings with his people,) yet at the same time he assured them of the pardon of their sin: this you know was the case with David. His greatest affliction, and that which befell him on account of a particular sin, and wherein God took vengeance on his invention, was ushered in with a word of grace, that God had done away or pardoned his sins, and that he should not die. This is expressed in the tenor of the covenant with the seed of Christ. Psalm 89: 30–34.

CHAPTER XVI.

HINDERANCES TO A SENSE OF FORGIVENESS.—AM I REGENERATED?

Another class of objections arise from *things internal*, things that are required in the soul, that it may have interest in forgiveness with God. Some of these we shall consider. They respect, first, *the state* of the soul: and, secondly, *some actings* in the soul.

As to the state, it is rightly urged that unless a man be REGENERATE, BORN AGAIN, he is not, he cannot be made partaker of mercy and pardon. "And here," say some, "all is dark to us: we know not well what this regeneration is; it is uncertain whether those who are regenerated can know that they are so, or whether this can in any measure be known to others. For our part, we neither know the time when nor the manner how any such work was wrought in us; and yet without this

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we can have no unfailing persuasion of forgiveness with God." This is the sum of the objections which perplexed souls urge against themselves as to their state. Hence, indeed, they draw forth reasonings with great variety, as they are suggested by their particular sins, failures and fears. My purpose is to lay down some general principles, which may be applied to particular cases.

I. It is most certain that there are two *states into which all mankind are divided;* and every one that lives in the world completely and absolutely belongs to one of them. These are the state of nature and the state of grace; of sin, and of righteousness by Christ: every man in the world belongs to one of these states. This the Scripture so abounds in, that it seems to be the principal thing that we are taught in it. It is as clear that there are two different states in this world as that there are in that to come; yea, all our faith and obedience depend on this truth: and not only so, but the covenant of God, the mediation of Christ, and all the promises and threats of the law and Gospel are built on this supposition. And this lays naked to a spiritual eye the abounding atheism that is in the world. Men are not only, like Nicodemus, ignorant of these things and wonder how they can be, but they scorn them, despise them, scoff at them. To make mention of being regenerated exposes one to reproach in the world. But whether men will or not, unto one of these conditions they must belong.

II. As these two states radically differ, there is a spe-

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cial difference between *the things that constitute* the one state and the other. Whatever there is of goodness or grace in an unregenerate person, there is in him that is regenerate something of another kind that is not in the first at all; for the difference of these states themselves is plain in Scripture. The one is a state of death, the other of life; the one of darkness, the other of light; the one of enmity against God, the other of reconciliation with him. And here I shall briefly give some marks of the truly regenerate.

1. The grace of regeneration *proceeds from a special spring or fountain*, the electing love of God: who "hath chosen us, that we should be holy." Ephes. 1 : 4. Our holiness, whose only spring is our regeneration, is that which God works in our souls in the pursuit of his eternal purpose of love and good-will towards us. So again, saith the apostle, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit." 2 Thess. 2 : 13. God having designed us to salvation as the end, hath also appointed the sanctification of the Spirit to be the means to bring us to the attainment of that end. But the best of common grace or gifts that may be in men unregenerate, are but products of the providence of God ordering all things in general unto his own glory and the good of them that shall be heirs of salvation. They are not fruits of electing eternal love, nor designed means for the infallible attaining of eternal salvation.

2. The graces of those who are regenerate have *a manifold respect or relation to the Lord Christ* that the common graces of others have not. I shall name one or two of these respects.

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They have a special moral relation to *the mediatory acts* of Christ in his oblation and intercession. Especial grace is an especial part of the purchase of Christ. By his death and blood-shedding he made a double purchase of his elect, of their persons to be his, of especial grace to be theirs. "He gave himself for his church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it unto himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." Eph. 5 : 26, 27. The design of Christ in giving himself for his church, was to procure for it that especial grace whereby, through the use of means, it might be regenerated, sanctified and purified. So Titus, 2 : 14. "He gave himself, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Real purification in grace and holiness has this especial relation unto the death of Christ, that he designed therein to procure it for his people. And in the pursuit of his purchase or acquisition of it, his purpose was really to bestow it upon them, or effectually to work it in them. Moreover, it has an especial relation unto his intercession, and that in a distinguishing manner from any other gifts or common graces that other men may receive. Giving us the rule and pattern of his intercession, John, 17, he tells us that he so prays, not for the world, but for his own, those whom the Father had given him, because they were his. ver. 9. And what is it that he prays for for them, in distinction from all other men whatever? Amongst others, this is one principal thing, "Sanctify them through thy truth." ver. 17. Their sanctification

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and holiness is granted upon that prayer and intercession of Christ which is peculiar to them, with an exclusion of all others: "I pray for them, I pray not for the world." Now, the common grace of unregenerate persons, whatever it be, has not this special relation to the oblation and intercession of Christ.

Again, the truly regenerate have a real relation to Christ, as he is the *living quickening Head of the church;* the fountain of spiritual life, and of all vital acts whatever. Christ is our life, and our life is hid with him in God. Col. 3 : 2, 3. That eternal life which consists in the knowledge of the Father and the Son, John, 17 : 3, is in him as the cause, head, spring and fountain. In him it is in its fullness, and from thence it is derived unto all that believe, who receive from his fulness grace for grace. John, 1 : 16. All true, saving, sanctifying grace, all spiritual life, is derived directly from Christ, as the living Head of his church and the fountain of all spiritual life. This the apostle expresses, "Speaking the truth in love, grow up into him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ; from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love." Eph. 4 : 15, 16. See also Col. 2 : 19. All grace in the whole body comes from the Head, Christ Jesus; and there is no growth or furtherance of it but by his effectual working in every part. Nothing then, no, not the least of this grace, can be obtained but by virtue of our union with Christ as our Head, because it consists in a vital effectual influence from him and his fulness. And this

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kind of relation unto Christ all grace that is, or may be in unregenerate men, is incapable of.

The grace of regeneration and its fruits are also administered in *the covenant*. This is the promise of the covenant, that God will write his law in our hearts, and put his fear in our inward parts, that we shall not depart from him. Jer. 32:40. This is that grace of which we speak. It is bestowed on none but those who are taken into covenant with God; for unto them alone it is promised, and by virtue thereof is it wrought in their souls. Now all unregenerate men are strangers from the covenant, and are not made partakers of that grace which is peculiarly and only promised thereby, and exhibited therein.

And further, every spark of saving regenerating grace is wrought in the soul *by the Holy Ghost*, as given to men to dwell in them and abide with them. He is the water given by Jesus Christ to believers, which is in them "a well of water springing up to everlasting life." John, 4:14. First, they receive the water, the spring itself, that is, the Holy Spirit; and from thence living waters rise up in them; they are produced by the Spirit, which is given to them. Now, though the common gifts and graces of unregenerate men are the effects of the power of the Holy Ghost, yet it doth not work in them and abide with them as a never-failing spring of spiritual life. Our Savior says expressly that the world, or unbelievers, do not know the Spirit, nor can receive him, or have him abiding in them. All which, in contradistinction to all unregenerate persons, is affirmed of all who believe.

The least of saving grace, such as is peculiar to them

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that are regenerate, *is spirit:* "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. John, 3:6. It has a spiritual being, and it is not to be drawn by any means out of the principles of nature; so it is said to be "a new creature." 2 Cor. 5:17. Be it ever so little or great, however it may differ in degree in one and in another, yet its nature is the same in all—it is a new creature. As the least worm of the earth, in the order of the old creation, is a creature as truly as the most glorious angel in heaven; so, in the order of the new creation, the least spark of true grace that is from the sanctifying Spirit is a new creature no less than the highest faith or love that ever were in the chiefest of the apostles. Now that which is spirit and that which is not spirit, that which hath a new spiritual being and that which hath none, whatever appearance of agreement there may be among them, do yet differ specifically from one another. And thus it is with the saving grace in the regenerate, and those common graces in others which are not saving. So that these states are eminently different and distinct the one from the other.

III. We proceed to consider the inquiry, Whether this state of regeneration *be known to him who is really a partaker of it, or to others?* To which I say, that as the difference between these two states is real, so it is discernible: they may be known by the persons themselves who are in those states, and also by others. It may be known who are born of God, and who are yet children of the devil; who are quickened by Christ, and who are yet dead in trespasses and sins. But here observe,

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I do not say that a state of regeneracy *is* always known to the persons themselves. Many cry, Peace, peace, when sudden destruction is at hand: these either think themselves regenerated when they are not, or else wilfully despise the consideration of what is required in them that they may have peace, and so delude their own souls to their ruin. And many that are truly born of God yet know it not: they may for a season walk in darkness and have no light.

Nor is it always known *to others*. It is not known to unregenerate men, for they know not what it is to be regenerate. Natural men perceive not the things of God, 1 Cor. 2:14, for they are foolishness to them, and no more can they judge aright of the persons in whom they are. And if they do at any time judge aright concerning any, yet they do not judge so upon right grounds, or with any evidence of what they judge. Wherefore generally they judge amiss of the regenerate; and because they make profession of something which they find not in themselves, they judge them hypocrites and false pretenders. For the things which evince their union with Christ and their being born of God the ungodly have no relish, nor can they receive them. Nor is this always discerned by them that are regenerate. They may sometimes, with Peter, think a Simon Magus to be a true believer; or, with Eli, a Hannah to be a daughter of Belial. Many hypocrites appear to have such gifts and graces that they pass among believers for such as are born of God; and many poor saints may be so disguised under darkness, temptation and sin as to be looked on as strangers from that family whereto indeed they belong. The judgment of man

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may fail, but the judgment of God is according to righteousness. Wherefore,

This is what we say: It may be known in the sedulous use of means appointed for that end to one's self and others, whether he be regenerate or not, so far as is practically essential to either: this may be known, and that assuredly, with reference to any *duty* in which we are concerned. The discharge of some duties in ourselves and towards others depends on this knowledge, and therefore we may attain it, so far as it is necessary for the discharge of such duties to the glory of God.

And here we may notice in few words *what duties* depend on our judging others to be regenerate, and *the principles* on which such a judgment may be formed.

1. There are many duties incumbent on us towards professors, which, without admitting a judgment to be made of their state, cannot be performed in faith; and it is solely in reference to these duties that we are called to judge of the state of others. For we are not giving countenance to a rash uncharitable censuring of men's spiritual condition, nor to any judging of any one beyond what our own duty towards him indispensably requires. Thus, if we are to lay down our lives for the brethren, it is essential that we should so far know them so to be, that we may hazard our lives in faith when we are called to do it. We are also to join them in those ordinances wherein we make a solemn profession that we are members of the same body with them, that we have the same Head, the same Spirit, faith and love. We must love them, because they are begotten of God, children of our heavenly Father; and, therefore, must on some good ground believe them to be so.

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In a word, the due performance of all mutual gospel-duties, to the glory of God and our own edification, depends on this supposition.

2. For *the grounds* of this judgment I shall mention one only, which all others do lean upon. This is pressed, 1 Cor. 12 : 12, 13. "As the body is *one*, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." They are all united to one Head; for as are the members of the body natural under one head; so is Christ mystical, that is, all believers, under Christ their Head. And this union they have by the indwelling of the same quickening Spirit which is in Christ their Head, and by him they are brought all into the same spiritual state and frame: they are made to drink into one and the same Spirit; for this same Spirit produceth the same effects in them all, the same in kind, though differing in degrees, as the apostle fully declares, Eph. 4 : 3–6. This Spirit is in them, and not in the world. John, 16. And as this gives them an affection in their duties one towards another, or in mutual caring for, rejoicing and sorrowing for one another, as members one of another, 1 Cor. 12 : 25, 26, so it reveals and discovers them to each other, so far as is necessary for the performance of the duties mentioned, in such a manner as becomes members of the same body. There is thus spiritually an answering of one to another, as face answereth face in water. They see and discern that in others which they experience in themselves; they taste and

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relish that in others, on which they feed themselves, and in which the life of their souls consists: unless their minds are blinded by temptation, or false opinions, or prejudice, they can, in their communion, discover that Spirit in each other which they are all made to drink into. This gives them the same likeness and image in the inward man, the same heavenly light in their minds, the same affections; and, being thus prepared and enabled to judge and discern of the state of each other in reference to their mutual duties, they have, moreover, the true rule of the word by which to judge of all spirits and spiritual effects. And this is the ground of all that love without dissimulation, and real communion among the saints of God in this world. But here two cautions must be suggested.

We should not judge the state of any men in the world *further than we are called* thereto in a way of duty; and we are so called only with reference to the duties we are to perform towards them. What have we to do to judge them that are without, that is, any one that we have not a call to consider in reference to our own duty? "Judge not, that ye be not judged." Let us leave all men, the worst of men, unless where evident duty requires more from us, to the judgment-seat of God. They are the servants of another, and they stand or fall to their own master. There have been great mistakes among us in this matter. Some have been ready to condemn all that go not along with them in every principle, yea, opinion or practice: and every day slight occasions and provocations are made the grounds of severe censure. But nothing is more contrary to the conduct of the meek and holy spirit of

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Christ. This is our rule: are we called to act towards any, as living members of the body of Christ, and that in such duties as we cannot perform in faith, unless we are persuaded that so they are? then are we, on the grounds and by the ways before mentioned, to satisfy ourselves of one another.

If we endeavor mutually to discern the condition of one another in reference to such ends, let us be sure to *pursue those ends*, when we have attained our satisfaction. What these ends are, has been showed. It is, that we may love them without dissimulation, as members of the same mystical body with us; that we may naturally take care of them, and for them; that we may delight sincerely in them; that we may minister unto their wants, temporal and spiritual; that we may watch over them with pity and compassion. These and the like are the only ends for which we are, at any time, called to the consideration of the spiritual condition of one another; if these be neglected, the other is useless. Here lies the life or death of all church-fellowship: it is built on the supposition that the members of it are all regenerate, and that they should perform those duties one towards another which are incumbent mutually on regenerate persons. If these are omitted, there is an end of all profitable church society Churches without this are but mere husks and shells of churches, carcasses without souls. For as there is no real union with Christ without faith, so there is no real union among the members of any church without love, and that acting itself in the duties mentioned. Let not this ordinance be in vain.

But we must return from this digression, to that

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which lies before us, which is concerning what a man may discern respecting himself being regenerate or born again. I say then,

IV. *Men may come to an assured persuasion that they are regenerate*, and that so far infallible that it will not deceive them when brought to the trial. For there are many duties whose performance, in faith to the glory of God and the edification of our own souls, depends on this persuasion and conviction. As,

1. *A due sense* of our relation to God, and direction of our spirits and hearts towards him. He that is born again, is born of God; he is begotten of God by the immortal seed of the word. Without a persuasion of this, how can a man, on grounds of faith, come to God as his Father? And how great a part of our obedience towards him, and communion with him, depends hereon, we all know. If men fluctuate all their days as to their real state, if they come to no settlement in it, no comfortable persuasion of it, they scarce ever act any genuine child-like acts of love or delight towards God, which exceedingly impeaches their whole obedience.

2. *Thankfulness* for grace received is one of the principal duties that is incumbent on believers in this world. Now, how can a man in faith bless God for that which he is utterly uncertain whether he have received from him or not? I know some men are very bold in this matter. They will bless God in a formal way for their regeneration, sanctification, justification, and the like. But if you ask them whether they themselves are regenerated by the Spirit or not, they will be ready to scoff at it, or, at least, to profess that they know no

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we receive the consolation tendered." I proceed then to show THE GROUNDS OF RESOLVING THIS PERPLEXING DOUBT in the ensuing directions.

DIRECTION I. See that the assurance which you look after and desire *is gospel-assurance*, and not such as is suited merely to your own imagining. Our second and third general rules about the nature of all spiritual assurance, and what is consistent therewith, are here to be taken into consideration. If you look to have such an absolute conviction of this matter as shall admit of no doubts and causes of new self-examination, you will be greatly deceived. Regeneration induces a new principle into the soul, but does not utterly expel the old: some would have security, not assurance. The principle of sin and unbelief will still abide and work in us. Their abiding and acting must needs put the soul upon a severe inquiry whether they are not prevalent in it beyond what the condition of regeneration will admit. The constant conflicts we must have with sin will not suffer us to have always so clear an evidence of our condition as we could desire. Such a persuasion as is prevalent against strong objections to the contrary, and keeps the heart in a due performance of those duties in faith which belong to the state of regeneration, is the substance of what you are to look after.

DIRECTION II. If you are doubtful concerning your state, do not expect *an extraordinary determination of it* by an immediate testimony of the Spirit of God. I grant that God sometimes gives his own Spirit immediately to bear witness with ours that we are the children of God, both in respect to regeneration and adoption. But he does so, as far as we can observe, in a way of sove-

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reignty, when and to whom he pleaseth. Besides, that men may content and satisfy themselves with his ordinary teachings, consolations and communications of grace, he has left the nature of that peculiar testimony of the Spirit very dark and difficult to be found out, few agreeing wherein it consists or what is its nature. No one man's experience is a rule to others; and an undue apprehension of it is a matter of great danger. Yet it is certain that humble souls, in extraordinary cases, may have recourse to it with benefit and relief. This then you may desire, you may pray for it, but not with such a frame of spirit as to refuse the other satisfaction which in the ways of truth and peace you may find. This is the putting of the hand, like Thomas, into the side of Christ; but blessed are they who believe, and yet have not seen.

Direction III. If you have, at any time formerly, received any special testimony of God given to your souls as to their sincerity, and consequently their regeneration, labor to recover it, and to *revive a sense of it* now in your darkness and trouble. I am persuaded that there are few believers to whom God does not at one time or other, in one duty or other, entering into or coming out of one temptation or another, give some singular testimony to their own souls of their sincerity and his acceptance. Sometimes he does this in a duty in which he enables the soul to make so near an approach to him that it is warmed, enlivened, satisfied with the presence, the gracious presence of God. Sometimes, when a man is entering on a great trial, a difficult or dangerous duty, so that death itself is feared in it, God comes in by one means or other with a secret intimation of his love,

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which he gives him to take along with him for his furniture and provision in his way, and thereby testifies to him his sincerity. And this serves, like the food of Elijah, for forty days in a wilderness condition. Sometimes he is pleased to shine immediately into the soul in the midst of its darkness and sorrow, wherewith it is surprised, as not looking for any such expression of kindness, and is thereby relieved against its own pressing self-condemnation. And sometimes the Lord is pleased to give these tokens of love to the soul as its refreshment, when it is coming out of the storm of temptations wherewith it has been tossed. And many other times and seasons there are wherein God is pleased to give believers some special testimony to their own integrity. But these are all wrought by a transient operation of the Spirit, exciting and enabling the heart to a spiritual sensible apprehension and receiving of God's kindness towards it. These things abide not in the power which they have upon our affections, but soon pass away. They are therefore to be treasured up in the mind, to be improved by faith, as occasion shall require; but we are apt to lose them. Most men know no other benefit of them but the joy whilst they feel them; yea, through ignorance in our duty to improve them, they prove like a sudden light brought into a dark place and again removed, which seems to increase and really aggravates our sense of the darkness. The true use of them is to lay them up and ponder them in our hearts, that they may be supports to us in a time of need. Have you then, who are now in the dark as to the question whether you are regenerate or not, ever received any such refreshing and cheering testimony from God given

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to your integrity and your acceptance with him? Call it over again, and make use of it against the discouragements which arise from your present darkness, and which keep you from sharing in the consolation tendered to you in this word of grace.

Direction IV. A due spiritual consideration of *the causes and effects* of regeneration, is the ordinary means whereby the souls of believers come to be satisfied concerning this work of God in them.

The principal *causes* of this work are the Spirit and the word. He that is born again, is born of the Spirit, John, 3:6; and of the word: "Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth." James, 1:18. "We are born again by the word of God that abideth for ever." 1 Peter, 1:23. Wherever, then, a man is regenerate, there has been an effectual work of the Spirit and of the word upon his soul. This is to be inquired after, and ordinarily it will discover itself. Such impressions will be made upon the soul, such a change will be wrought and produced in it, as will not escape a spiritual, diligent search and inquiry. And this is much of the duty of such as are in the dark, and uncertain concerning the accomplishment of this work in themselves. Let them call to mind what have been the actings of the Spirit by the word upon their souls; what light has thereby been communicated to their minds; what discoveries of the Lord Christ and the way of salvation have been made to them; what sense and detestation of sin have been wrought in them; what satisfaction has been given to the soul in choosing, accepting and acquiescing in the righteousness of Christ; what resignation of the heart unto God, according to the tenor of

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the covenant of grace. Call to mind what transactions there have been between God and your soul about these things; how far they have been carried on; whether you have broken off the treaty with God and refused his terms; or if not, where the hinderance is between you, and what is the reason, since God has graciously begun to deal thus with you, that you are not yet come to a thorough close with him in the work and design of his grace. The defect must of necessity lie in you. God doeth nothing in vain; had he not been willing to receive you, he would not have dealt with you so far as he hath. There is nothing then remains to establish your condition but a resolved act of your own will in answering the mind and will of God. By this search may the soul come to satisfaction in this matter, or at least find out and discover where the hinderance is, whence the uncertainty arises, and what is wanting to complete its desire.

Again, this work may be discovered by its *effects*. There is something produced by it in the soul, which may also be considered either with respect to its existence or its actings and operations. In the first respect it is spirit, "that which is born of the Spirit," John, 3:6, which is produced by the effectual operation of the Spirit of God. It is a new creature: "He that is in Christ Jesus (who is born again) is a new creature; 2 Cor. 5:17; he has a new life, a spiritual life. Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:1. In brief, it is an habitual supply of all the faculties of the soul with new spiritual, vital principles, enabling a person in all instances of obedience to lead a spiritual life unto God. This principle is by this work produced in the soul; and in respect to

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its actings, it consists in all the gracious operations of the mind, will and affections, in the duties of obedience which God has required. This is that which gives life to our duties, (without which the best of our works are but dead works,) and renders them acceptable unto the living God.

It is not my business at large to pursue these things I only mention them, that persons who are kept back from the consolation tendered from the forgiveness that is with God, because they cannot comfortably conclude that they are born again, may know how to make a right judgment of themselves, and that it is such persons alone to whom these consolations truly and really belong. Let such persons, then, not fluctuate up and down in generals and uncertainties, with heartless complaints, which is the ruin of the peace of their souls, but let them really put things to the trial, by the examination of the causes and effects of the work they inquire after. It is by the use of such means that God will be pleased to give them all the assurance and establishment concerning their state which is needful for them, and which may give them encouragement in their course of obedience.

"But granting all that has been said, what if a man, by the utmost search and inquiry that he is able to make, cannot attain any satisfactory persuasion that indeed this great work of God's grace has been wrought in his soul; is this a sufficient ground to keep him from accepting support and consolation from the truth that there is forgiveness with God?" I say, then, further, that

1. Regeneration *does not, in the order of time, precede*

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the soul's interest in forgiveness with God, or its being made partaker of the pardon of sin. I confess the method of the Gospel is, that absolution, acquittance, or the pardon of sin, is the foundation of the communication of all saving grace to the soul, and so precedes all grace whatever in the sinner. But, because this absolution or pardon of sin is to be received by faith, whereby the soul is really made partaker of it and all its benefits; and faith also is the radical grace which we receive in our regeneration; for it is by faith that our hearts are purified, as an instrument in the hand of the great purifier, the Spirit of God; I place these two together, and shall not dispute as to their priority in nature; but in time the one doth not precede the other.

2. It is hence evident that an assurance of being regenerate is no way *previously necessary* to the believing of an interest in forgiveness; so that if a man have not the assurance, it is his duty to trust in Divine forgiveness. When convinced persons cried out, What shall we do to be saved? the answer was, Believe, and you shall be saved. To believe in Christ, and in the remission of sin by his blood, is the first thing that convinced sinners are called to. They are not directed first to assure their souls that they are born again, and then afterwards believe; but they are first to believe that the remission of sin is tendered to them in the blood of Christ, and that by him they may be justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law. Nor is it the duty of men to question whether they have faith or not, but actually to believe; and faith in its operation will evidence itself. See Acts, 13 : 38, 39. Suppose, then, that you do not know that

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you are born of God; that you have no prevailing, refreshing evidence of it—should this hinder you? Should this discourage you from believing forgiveness, from closing with the promises, and thereby obtaining in yourselves an interest in forgiveness with God? Not at all; nay, this ought exceedingly to excite and stir you up to your duty herein. For,

Suppose that indeed you *are yet in the state of sin*, and are only brought under the power of light and conviction; this is the way for a translation into a state of spiritual life and grace. If you delay the acting of faith in forgiveness until you are regenerate, you may, and probably you will, come short both of forgiveness and regeneration. Here lay your foundation, and then your building will go on. This will open the door to you, and give you an entrance into the kingdom of God. Christ is the door; do not think to climb over the wall: enter by him, or you will be kept out.

And suppose that you *are born again*, but yet know it not, as is the condition of many: this is the way whereby you may receive an evidence thereof. It is good to look after all signs and pledges of our spiritual condition, and rightly to improve them; but the best course is to follow the genuine natural actings of faith, which leads us into the most settled apprehensions concerning our relation to God and acceptance with him. Believe first the forgiveness of sin as the effect of mere grace and mercy in Christ. Let the faith of this be nourished and strengthened in your soul. This will insensibly influence your hearts to a comforting gospel persuasion of your state towards God, which will be accompanied with assured rest and peace.

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To conclude our remarks on this point, remember that what has been said with reference to the state of regeneration in general, may be applied to every particular objection or cause of fear or discouragement that may be reduced to that head. Such are all objections that arise from particular sins, from aggravations of sin by their greatness or circumstances, or relapses into them. The way that the consideration of these things prevails upon the mind to fear is by begetting an apprehension in men that they are not regenerate; for if they were, they suppose they could not be so overtaken or entangled. The rules, therefore, laid down are suited to the straits of the souls of sinners in all such particular cases.

There remains another point in the general objection urged, which, though not of any great importance in itself, it is well to remove out of the way, that it may not leave entanglements upon the minds of any: namely, that some know not nor can give an account of *the time of their conversion* to God, and therefore cannot be satisfied that the saving work of his grace hath passed upon them.

It has been shown that, in reference to our state, there are many things on which we may safely found a judgment concerning ourselves; and it is great folly to wave them all, and put the issue of the matter upon *one circumstance*. If a man have a trial at law in which he has many evidences for him and only one circumstance is questionable, he will not cast the weight of his cause on that disputed circumstance, but will plead the evidences that are more clear and testify more fully in his behalf. I will not deny that the time of conversion is

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often an important circumstance. In the affirmative, when it is known, it is of great use, tending to stability and consolation; but yet it is but a circumstance such as the being of the thing itself does not depend on. He that is alive may know that he was born, though he know neither the place where nor the time when. And so may he that is spiritually alive, and has ground of evidence that he is so, that he was born again, though he know neither when, nor where, nor how. And this case is usual in persons of quiet natural temper who have had the advantage of education under means of light and grace. God often in such persons begins and carries on the work of his grace insensibly, so that they come to good growth and maturity before they know that they are alive. Such persons come at length to be satisfied in saying, with the blind man in the Gospel, How our eyes were opened we know not; only one thing we know, whereas we were blind by nature, now we see.

Even in this matter also we must, it may be, be content to live by faith, and to believe as well what God hath done in us, if it be the matter and subject of his promises, as what he hath done for us, the ground whereof also is the promise, and nothing else.

There is another head of objection against the soul's receiving consolation from an interest in forgiveness, arising from the consideration of its present state and condition as to ACTUAL HOLINESS, DUTIES AND SINS. Souls complain, when in darkness and under temptations, that they cannot find that holiness nor those fruits of it in themselves which they suppose an interest in pardoning

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mercy will produce. Their hearts they find are weak, and all their duties are worthless; if they were weighed in the balance they would be all found light as air. In the best of them there is such a mixture of self-hypocrisy, unbelief, vain-glory, that they are even ashamed and confounded with the remembrance of them. These things fill them with discouragements, so that they refuse to be comforted or to entertain any refreshing persuasion of their good estate; but rather conclude that they are utter strangers to forgiveness with God, and so continue helpless in their depths.

According to the method pursued, I shall only lay down some general rules that may support a soul under such despondencies, that none of these things may weaken its endeavors to lay hold of forgiveness. And,

I. This is the proper place to put in execution our eighth rule, to *take heed of heartless complaints*, when *vigorous actings of grace* are expected of us. If it be thus indeed, why lie you on your face? why do you not rise and strive to the utmost, giving all diligence to add one grace to another, till you find yourself in a better frame? Supposing, then, the putting of that rule into practice, I add that,

1. *Known holiness is apt to degenerate* into self-righteousness. What God gives us in sanctification we are ready enough to reckon on the score of justification. It is difficult to have evidence of grace in us, and yet trust solely in Christ as perishing sinners. We have so much of the Pharisee in us by nature, that it is sometimes well that our good is hid from us. We are ready to take our corn and wine and bestow them on other lovers. Were there not in our hearts a perceived prin-

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ciple of corruption, and in our duties a discernible mixture of self, it would be impossible we should walk so humbly as is required of those who hold communion with God in a covenant of grace and pardoning mercy. It is a good life which is attended both with a faith of righteousness and a sense of corruption. Whilst I know Christ's righteousness, I may be less anxious to know my own holiness. To be holy is necessary; to know it, sometimes a temptation.

2. Even *duties* of God's appointment, when turned into self-righteousness, are God's greatest abhorrence. Isa. 66:2, 3. What hath a good original may be vitiated by a bad end.

3. Often holiness in the heart is more known by *the opposition* there made to it than by its own prevalent working; the Spirit's operation is known by the flesh's opposition. We find a man's strength by the burden he carries, and not the pace that he goes. "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" is a better evidence of grace and holiness than "God, I thank thee I am not as other men." A heart pressed, grieved, burdened, not by the guilt of sin only, which troubles an awakened conscience, but by the close adhering power of indwelling sin, tempting, seducing, soliciting, hindering, captivating, disquieting, may from thence have as clear an evidence of holiness as from a delightful fruit-bearing. What is it that is troubled and grieved in thee? what is it that seems to be almost killed and destroyed, that cries out, complains, longs for deliverance? Is it not the new creature? is it not the principle of spiritual life whereof thou art partaker? I speak not of trouble and disquiet for sin

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committed, nor of fears and perturbations of mind lest sin should break forth to loss, shame, ruin, dishonor; nor of the contending of a convinced conscience lest damnation should ensue; but of the striving of the spirit against sin from a hatred and loathing of it, in view of all the considerations of love, grace, mercy, fear, the beauty of holiness, excellency of communion with God, that are proposed in the Gospel. If thou seemest to thyself to be only passive in these things, to do nothing but endure the assaults of sin; yet if thou art sensible, and standest under the stroke of it as under the stroke of an enemy, there is the root of the matter. And as it is thus as to the substance and being of holiness, so it is also as to the degree of it. Degrees of holiness are to be measured very much by opposition. He may have more grace than another who brings not forth so much fruit, because he has more opposition, more temptation, Isa. 41:17; and a sense of the want of all is a great sign of something genuine in the soul.

II. As to what was alleged of the sense of nothingness and selfishness in duty, I say,

1. It is certain whilst we are in the flesh our duties will *taste of the vessel* whence they proceed. Weakness, defilements, treachery, hypocrisy will attend them. To this purpose, whatever some pretend to the contrary, is the complaint of the church, Isa. 64:6. The chaff oftentimes is so mixed with the wheat that corn can scarce be discerned. And this know, that the more spiritual any man is, the more he sees of his want of spirituality in his spiritual duties. An outside performance will satisfy an outside christian. Job abhorred himself most when he knew himself best. The clearer disco-

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veries we have of God, the viler will every thing of self appear. Nay, further, duties and performances are often very ill measured by us; and those seem to be first which indeed are last, and those to be last which indeed are first. I do not doubt but a man, when he has had distractions to wrestle with, no outward advantage to further him, no extraordinary incitements to hope, fear or sorrow, may rise from his knees with thoughts that he has done nothing in his duty but provoke God—when there has been more workings of grace in contending with the deadness of the soul, than when, by a concurrence of moved natural affections and outward provocations, a frame has been raised that to the party himself has seemed to reach to heaven—so that it may be this perplexity about duties is nothing but what is common to the people of God, and which ought to be no obstruction to peace and confidence.

2. As to the complaint that we find *hypocrisy* in our hearts, you know what is usually answered: it is one thing to do a thing in hypocrisy, another not to do it without a mixture of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy, in its full extent, is every thing that in matter or manner comes short of sincerity. Now our sincerity is no more perfect than our other graces; so that in its measure it abides with us, and adheres to all we do. In like manner it is one thing to do a thing for vain-glory or to be seen of men, and another not to be able wholly to keep off the subtle insinuations of self and vain-glory. He that does a thing in hypocrisy and for vain-glory is satisfied with some corrupt end obtained, though he be sensible that he sought such an end. He that does a thing from right motives but with some mixture of

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hypocrisy, that is, with some breaches upon the degree of his sincerity, with some insensible regard to outward considerations, is not satisfied with a self-end attained, and is dissatisfied with the defect of his sincerity. In a word, if sincere in private duties and in public performances; in praying, hearing, giving alms, zealous actings for God's glory and the love of the saints, though these duties are not sometimes done without some mixture of hypocrisy, I mean as traced to its most subtle insinuations of self and vain-glory, yet they are not done in hypocrisy, nor do they denominate the persons by whom they are performed hypocrites. Yet I say of this, as of all that is spoken before, it is of use to relieve us under a troubled condition, but of none to support us or encourage us to abide in it.

3. Know that *God despiseth not small things;* he takes notice of the least breathings of our hearts after him, when we ourselves may perceive no such thing. He knows the mind of the Spirit in those workings which never rise to such a height that we can reflect upon them with our observation. Every thing that is of him is noted in his book, though not in ours; he took notice, that when Sarah was acting unbelief towards him, yet she showed respect to Abraham. Gen. 18:12; 1 Pet. 3:6. And even whilst his people are sinning, he can find something in their hearts, words or ways, that pleases him—much more so in their duties. He is a skilful refiner that can find much gold in ore where we see nothing but lead or clay. He remembers the duties which we forget, and blots out the sins which we remember. He justifies our persons, though ungodly, and will also our duties, though not perfectly godly.

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4. To give a little further support in reference to our wretched miserable duties, and to them that are in perplexities on that account, know that Jesus Christ takes whatever is evil and unsavory out of them, and *makes them accepted*. When an unskilful servant gathers herbs, flowers, and weeds in a garden, you gather those out that are useful, and cast the rest away. Christ deals so with our performances. All the ingredients of self that are in them he takes away, and adds incense to what remains, and presents it to God. This is the cause that the saints at the last day, when they meet their own duties and performances, know them not, they are so changed from what they were when they went out of their hands: "Lord, when saw we thee naked or hungry?" so that God accepts a little, and Christ makes our little a great deal.

5. Is this an argument to *keep thee from believing?* The reason why thou art no more holy is, because thou hast no more faith. If thou hast no holiness, it is because thou hast no faith; holiness is the purifying of the heart by faith, or our obedience unto the truth. And the reason why thou art no more in duty, is that thou art no more in believing; the reason why thy duties are weak and imperfect, is that thy faith is weak and imperfect. Hast thou no holiness? believe, that thou mayest have; hast thou but a little, or that which is imperceptible? be steadfast in believing, that thou mayest abound in obedience. Do not resolve not to eat thy meat until thou art strong, when thou hast no means of being strong but by eating thy bread, which strengthens the heart of man.

III. THE POWER OF INDWELLING SIN is another cause

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of despondency: "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the lusts thereof." "But we find," say some, "corruptions working in our hearts, carrying us captive to the law of sin; they disquiet with their power as well as with their guilt. Had we been made partakers of the law of the spirit of life, we had, ere this, been more set free from the law of sin and death. Had sin been pardoned fully, it would have been subdued more effectually."

There are three considerations which make the actings of indwelling sin so perplexing to the soul.

1. Because they are *unexpected*. The soul looks not for them after the first great conquest made of sin, and universal engagement of the heart unto God. When it first says, "I have sworn, and have steadfastly purposed to keep thy righteous judgment," commonly there is peace, at least for a season, from the vigorous actings of sin. There are many reasons why it should be so: old things are then passed away, all things are become new; and the soul, under the power of that universal change, is utterly turned away from those things that should foment or cherish any lust or temptation. Now, when some of these advantages are past, and sin begins to stir and act again, the soul is surprised, and thinks the work it hath passed through was not true and effectual, but temporary only. Yea, he thinks perhaps that sin hath more strength than it had before, because he was more sensible to it than he was before. As one that hath a dead limb, whilst it is mortified endures deep cuttings and lancings, and feels them not; but when sense is brought into it again, he feels the least cut, and may think the instruments sharp-

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er than they were before, and yet all the difference is, that he hath a quickness of sense which before he had not: so it may be with a person in this case; he may think lust more powerful than it was before, because he is more sensible to it than he was before. Yea, sin in the heart is like a serpent; you may pull out its sting and cut it in many pieces; though it can sting mortally no more, nor move its whole body at once, yet it will move in all its parts, and make an appearance of greater motion than formerly. So it is with lust, when it has received its death wound and is cut in pieces, yet it moves in so many parts as it were in the soul, that it amazes him that has to do with it; and thus coming unexpectedly, fills the spirit with alarm.

2. Indwelling sin has also in its actings *a universality*. This also surprises; there is a universality in the actings of sin, even in believers. There is no evil that it will not move to; no good that it will not attempt to hinder; no duty that it will not defile. And the reason of this is, we are sanctified but in part; not in any part wholly, though savingly and truly in every part. Sin remains in all the affections, and so may be acting in any form that the nature of man is liable to. Degrees of sin there are that all regenerate persons are exempted from; but unto solicitations to all kinds of sin they are exposed; and this helps on the temptation.

3. It is *endless and restless;* never quiet, conquering nor conquered: it gives not over, but rebels being overcome; or assaults afresh, having prevailed. Ofttimes, after a victory obtained and an opposition subdued, the soul is in expectation of rest and peace from its ene-

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my; but this continues not. It works and rebels again and again, and will do so whilst we live in this world; so that no end will be put to our conflict but by death. This is at large handled elsewhere, in a treatise on this peculiar subject.

These actings of indwelling sin often embarrass the soul in making a judgment of itself, and leave it in the dark as to its state. But here further observe,

1. The sensible, powerful actings of indwelling sin are not inconsistent with *a state of grace*. There are in the same person contrary principles, the flesh and the spirit; and there are contrary actings from these principles: "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh," Gal. 5 : 17, and these actings are described to be greatly vigorous: "Lust wars against our souls." James, 4 : 1; 1 Pet. 2 : 11. Now, to war is not to make faint or gentle opposition, to be slighted and contemned, but it is to go out with great strength, to use craft, subtlety and force, so as to put the whole issue to hazard. So these lusts war; such are their actings in and against the soul. And therefore the apostle saith, "You cannot do the things that you would." Gal. 5 : 1. In this conflict indeed the understanding is left unconquered; it condemns and disapproves of the sin, and the will is not subdued; it would not do the evil that is pressed upon it, and there is a hatred or aversion remaining in the affections to sin: but yet sin rebels, fights and leads captive. Rom. 7 : 14–17. This objection, then, may receive this speedy answer. Powerful actings, universal endless strugglings of indwelling sin, seducing to all that is evil, putting itself forth to the disturbance of all that is good, is no sufficient proof of

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a state of alienation from God. See on this point the other treatise referred to.

2. Your state is not at all to be measured by the opposition that sin makes to you, but by *the opposition you make to it;* be that ever so great, if this be good, be that ever so restless and powerful, if this be sincere, yet, though you may be disquieted, you can have no reason to despond.

I have mentioned these things only to give a specimen of the objections which men usually raise against an actual closing with forgiveness to their consolation: and have also given some rules for their relief, not intending in them absolute satisfaction as to the whole of the cases mentioned, but only so to remove the darkness raised by them that it may not hinder any from mixing with faith the word dispensed from this blessed testimony, that "there is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared."

CHAPTER XVII.

EARNEST WAITING ON GOD, THE FRUIT OF FORGIVENESS.—NATURE OF THIS DUTY.

We now proceed to the second part of this Psalm, which contains the deportment of a sin-perplexed soul, when by faith it has discovered where its rest lies, and from whom its relief is to be expected, even the for-

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giveness which is with God. And as before mentioned, there are two things in general that the soul in that condition applies itself to; of which the first respects itself, and the other the whole Israel of God.

That which respects itself is the description of the frame of heart and spirit into which the Psalmist was brought upon faith's discovery of forgiveness in God, with the duty to which he applied himself, the grounds of it, and the manner of its performance:

I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. verses 5, 6.

The words rendered strictly, or word for word, lie thus: "I have earnestly expected Jehovah; my soul hath expected, and in his word I have tarried (or waited.) My soul to the Lord, more than (or before) the watchmen in the morning; the watchmen in the morning; (or unto the morning.")

"*I have waited, or expected;*" the word in the original signifies to expect, to hope, to wait. It denotes to be intent on any one with great desire; to behold or regard him, and to depend upon him; and it also expresses the earnest inclination and intention of the will and mind. Paul seems to have expressed this word to the full, Rom. 8: 19, by *apokaradokia*, an intent or earnest expectation, expressing itself by putting forth the head, and looking round with earnestness and diligence. And this is also signified expressly by this word, Psalm 49: 20, in the Hebrew, "And I looked for some to take pity." I looked round about, this way and that way, diligently and solicitously, to see if any would pity me,

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or lament with me. Thus, I have waited, is as much as, "I have diligently, with intenseness of soul, mind, will and affections, looked unto God, in earnest expectation of that from him which I stand in need of, and which must come forth from the forgiveness that is with him."

I have, saith he, waited for, or expected *Jehovah;* he uses the same name of God in his expectation, that he first fixes on in his application to him.

It is not this or that means, nor this or that assistance, but it is Jehovah himself that he expects and waits for. It is Jehovah himself that must satisfy the soul: his favor and loving-kindness, and what flows from them. If he come not himself, if he give not himself, nothing else will relieve.

"*My soul doth wait,*" or expect; it is no outward duty I am engaged in, no lip-labor, no bodily work, no formal, cold, careless performance of a duty: no, "my soul doth wait;" it is soul-work, heart-work; I wait, I wait with my whole soul.

"*In his word do I hope,*" or wait. There is no difficulty in these words; the word used (in the Hebrew) signifies "to hope, expect, endure and sustain, with care, solicitousness and endeavors." Hence the Septuagint have rendered the word, "I have sustained and waited with patience;" and this on *the word:* he sustained his soul with the word of promise, that it should not utterly faint. Seeing he had made a discovery of grace and forgiveness, though yet at a great distance; he had a sight of land, though he was yet in a storm at sea; and therefore so encourages himself, or his soul, that he does not despond.

But yet all this reaches not the intenseness of the

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soul of the Psalmist in this his expectation of Jehovah. The earnest engagement of his soul in this duty rises above what he can express. Therefore he proceeds, "My soul waiteth for the Lord," that is, expects him, looks for him, waits for his coming to me in love, and with forgiveness, "*more than the watchers for the morning, the watchers for the morning.*" The words may refer generally to those who keep the watch of the night, as they look, and long for, and expect the morning, when being dismissed from their guard, they may take the sleep they need and desire; or, they may refer to watching in the temple as the Chaldee paraphrast renders the words: "more than they that look for the morning-watch, which they carefully observe, that they may offer the morning sacrifice." In this sense, as the watchers in the temple look diligently for the appearance of the morning, that they may with joy offer the morning sacrifice in the appointed season; so, and with more diligence, does my soul wait for Jehovah.

We have then the expression of the duty on which he was intent, earnest waiting for Jehovah; the foundation of his waiting and expectation; that is, the word of God, the word of promise; he diligently hoped in the word; and the frame of his spirit in this duty, and the manner of his performance of it, as expressed in the words themselves that he uses in the emphatical reduplication, yea, triplication of his expression, "I wait for God, my soul waiteth for God, my soul for the Lord;" and in the comparison instituted between his discharge of his duty, and other performances of a corporeal watch, with the greatest care and diligence "more than they that watch for the morning."

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Let us then now consider the words, as they contain the frame and working of a sin-entangled soul.

Having been raised out of his depths by the discovery of forgiveness in God, yet not being immediately made partaker of that forgiveness, as to a comforting sense of it, he gathers up his soul from wandering from God, and supports it from sinking under his present condition.

"It is," saith he, "Jehovah alone, with whom is forgiveness, that can relieve and do me good; his favor, his loving-kindness, his communication of mercy and grace is what I need; on him therefore do I with all heedfulness attend; on him do I wait; my soul is filled with expectation from him: surely he will come to me, he will come and refresh me; though he seem as yet to be afar off, and to leave me in these depths, yet I have his word of promise to support and stay my soul, on which I will lean until I obtain the enjoyment of him and his kindness, which is better than life."

And this is the frame of a sin-entangled soul, who hath really by faith discovered forgiveness in God, but is not yet made partaker of a comforting, refreshing sense of it. And we may represent it in the ensuing observations.

The first proper fruit of faith's discovery of forgiveness in God to a sin-distressed soul, is waiting in patience and expectation.

The proper object of a sin-distressed soul's waiting and expecting, is God himself as reconciled in Christ: "I have waited for Jehovah."

The word of promise is the soul's great support in waiting for God: "in thy word do I hope."

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Sin-distressed souls wait for God with earnestness, diligence and expectation, from the redoubling of the expression.

Continuance in waiting until God appears to the soul, is necessary and prevailing; necessary, as that without which we cannot attain assistance; and prevailing, as that wherein we shall never fail.

Establishment in waiting on God where there is no present sense of forgiveness, yet gives the soul much secret rest and comfort. The Psalmist having attained thus far, can now look about him, as in the closing verses, and begin to deal with others, and exhort them to an expectation of grace and mercy.

And thus, though the soul be not absolutely in the haven of consolation where it would be, yet it has cast out an anchor that gives it establishment and security. Though it be still tossed, yet it is secured from shipwreck, and is rather sick than in danger: waiting on God is a condition of safety.

Hence he now turns himself to others, and on his discovery of forgiveness in God, and the establishment and consolation he found in waiting on him, he calls upon and encourages others to the same duty. ver. 7, 8.

Our design in this treatise involves the consideration of all the above propositions; still, with respect to the state of the soul represented in the Psalm, many things that might justly be insisted on in the improvement of these truths have been anticipated in our former general rules. To them we must therefore refer, to avoid repetition. We shall notice the principal points with all possible brevity, yet so as not wholly to omit any directions here tendered to us as to the guidance of

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the soul, whose condition, and the working of whose faith, is here described.

We proceed then to consider THE DUTY OF WAITING ON GOD FOR FORGIVENESS.

This the Psalmist expresses to have been both his duty and his practice. And he does it so emphatically that I know not that any duty is any where in the Scriptures recommended to us with such lively representations. Call to mind then what has been said concerning the state of the soul inquired into: its depths, entanglements and sense of sin, with its application to God about those things, as also what has been said of the nature of forgiveness, with the revelation that is made of it to the faith of believers; and that this may be done where the soul has no refreshing sense of its own interest therein. It knows not that its own sins are forgiven, although it believes that there is forgiveness with God. Now, the principal duty incumbent on such a soul is that laid down in our first proposition, namely, *patient waiting and expectation*.

And here, 1. The nature of the duty itself is to be declared. And, 2. The necessity and usefulness of its practice is to be evinced and demonstrated.

As to *the nature* of this duty, we may observe that it does not consist in any particular acting of the soul, but in its whole spiritual frame and deportment in reference to the end desired. And this waiting, which is comprehensive of the especial duties of the soul in the case described, comprehends these three things: 1. Quietness in opposition to haste and tumultuousness of spirit. 2. Diligence in opposition to spiritual sloth, despondency and neglect of means. 3. Expectation in opposi-

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tion to despair, distrust, and other actings of unbelief.

1. *Quietness*, or composure of spirit. Hence this waiting is sometimes expressed by silence: "It is good both to hope (in the Heb.) and to be silent, for the salvation of the Lord," Lam. 3 : 26, that is, to wait quietly, as we have rendered the word. And the same word we sometimes render *rest:* "Rest on the Lord," Psalm 37 : 7, (in the Heb. be silent unto him,) where it is joined with hoping or waiting, as what belongs to its nature; and so in sundry other places. And this God in an especial manner calls souls unto in straits and distresses: "In quietness and confidence," saith he, "shall be your strength." Isaiah, 30 : 15. And the effect of the righteousness of God by Christ is said to be "quietness and assurance for ever." Isaiah, 32 : 17. First quietness, and then assurance. Now, this silence and quietness which accompanies waiting, yea, which is an essential part of it, is

Opposed to *haste*. Haste is the soul's undue lifting up itself, proceeding from a weariness of its condition, to press after an end of its troubles, not according to the conduct of the Spirit of God. Thus, when God calls his people to waiting, he expresses the contrary by the lifting up of the soul: "Though the vision tarry, wait for it; behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him, but the just shall live by his faith." Hab. 2 : 3, 4. God has given the soul a vision of peace through the discovery of forgiveness with him; but he will have us wait for an actual participation and enjoyment of it. He that will not do so, but lifts up his soul, that is, in making haste beyond the rule and method of the Spirit of God in this matter, his heart is not upright in him, nor will

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he know what it is to live by faith. This ruins and disappoints many a soul in its attempts for forgiveness. The prophet, speaking of this matter, tells us that "he that believeth shall not (and will not) make haste." Isa. 28 : 16. Which words the apostle twice making use of, in both places renders them, "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed," or confounded. Rom. 9 : 33 ; 10 : 11. And that because this haste turns men off from believing, and so disappoints their hopes and leaves them to shame and confusion. Men, with a sense of the guilt of sin, having some discovery made to them of the rest and peace which they may obtain by forgiveness, are ready to catch greedily at it, and make false, unsound, undue applications of it to themselves. They cannot bear the yoke that the Lord hath put upon them, but grow impatient under it, and cry with Rachel, "Give me children, or I die." Any way, they would obtain it. Now, as the first duty of such a soul is to apply itself to waiting, so the first entrance into waiting consists in this silence and quietness of heart and spirit. This is the soul's endeavor to keep itself humble, satisfied with the sovereign pleasure of God, and refusing all ways and means of rest and peace but what it is guided and directed to by the word and Spirit.

As true waiting on God is opposed to haste, so it is to *tumultuous thoughts and disquiet*. The soul is silent, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." Psalm 39 : 9. He redoubles the expression, by which he describes his endeavor to quiet his soul in the will of God. In the condition represented the soul is apt to have many tumultuous thoughts, or a multitude of perplexing thoughts, of no use or advantage to

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it. How they are to be watched against and rejected was before declared in our general rules: this quietness in waiting will prevent them.

2. *Diligence*, in opposition to spiritual sloth, is included in the duty of waiting on God. Diligence is the activity of the mind in the regular use of means for the pursuit of any end proposed. The end aimed at by the soul is a comforting, refreshing interest in forgiveness with God. For the attaining of this, God has instituted and blessed various means. A neglect of them, through negligence or sloth, will certainly disappoint the soul from attaining that end. It is confessedly so in things natural. He that soweth not, must not think to reap; he that clothes not himself, will not be warm; nor will he enjoy health who neglects the means of it. Men understand this as to their outward concerns, and though they have a due respect to the blessing of God, they expect not to be rich without industry. It is so also in things spiritual. God has appointed one thing to be the means of obtaining another; in the use of them he blesses us, and from the use of them doth his glory arise; because they are his own appointment. This diligence wholly respects practice, or the regular use of means. A man is said to be diligent in business, to have a diligent hand: though it be an affection of the mind, yet it simply respects practice and effort. This diligence in his waiting, David expresses, Psalm 40 : 1. We render it, "I waited patiently;" that is, (in the Hebrew,) "waiting, I have waited;" that is, diligently, earnestly, in the use of means. So he describes this duty by an elegant similitude: "Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the

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hand of their masters; and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God until he have mercy on us." Psalm 123 : 2. Servants that wait upon their masters, and look to their hands, expect an intimation of their mind as to what they would have them do. So, says David, do we wait for mercy; not in a slothful neglect of duty, but in a constant readiness to observe the will of God in all his commands.

An illustration of this we have in the spouse, when she was in the condition here described. Cant. 3 : 1, 2. She wanted the presence of her Beloved, and where the presence of Christ is not, there can be no sense of forgiveness. At first she seeks him upon her bed: "By night, upon my bed, I sought him whom my soul loveth, I sought him, but I found him not." And does she rest in merely desiring him? No, she resolves to use all means. In the city, streets and fields she would inquire after him. And the blessed result is, "She found him, she held him, she would not let him go." verse 4. This then belongs to the waiting of the soul. Diligence in the use of means, whereby God is pleased ordinarily to communicate a sense of pardon and forgiveness, is a principal part of it. What these means are, is known. Prayer, meditation, reading, the dispensation of the word and ordinances are all appointed to this purpose; they are all means of communicating love and grace to the soul. Be not then heartless or slothful; up and be doing; attend with diligence to the word of grace; be fervent in prayer, assiduous in the use of all ordinances, that thou mayest find him whom thy soul loveth; and God, through him, will speak peace unto thee.

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3. There is *expectation* in true waiting on God, which is in direct opposition to all the actings of unbelief, and is the very life and soul of the duty under consideration. So the Psalmist declares, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him." Psalm 62 : 5. The soul will not, cannot in a due manner wait on God, unless it has expectation from him; unless, as James speaks, he looks to receive some good from him. chap. 1 : 7. The soul in this condition regards forgiveness not only as by itself desired, but principally as it is by God promised. This is expressed in the fourth proposition before laid down, namely, That sin-distressed souls wait for God with earnestness, intentness of mind and expectation. As this appears from the redoubling of the Psalmist's expression, "I wait; my soul doth wait;" it also does principally from the nature of the comparison that he makes of himself with them that watch for the morning. Those that watch for the morning not only desire it and prepare for it, but they expect it, and *know assuredly that it will come.* Though darkness may, for a time, be troublesome, and continue longer than they would desire, yet they know that the morning has its appointed time of return, beyond which it will not tarry; therefore they look out for its appearance.

So it is with the soul. "In the morning," says David, "will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up." Psalm 5 : 3. The Psalmist seems here to declare the general frame of his spirit in walking with God. "I will," saith he, "order all things towards God," so as that I may wait upon him in the ways of his appointment, "and will look up." The last expression seems

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in our translation to express his posture in prayer. But the word is of another import. It is diligently to look after that which is coming towards us, a looking-out after the accomplishment of our expectation. This is a part of waiting for God; yea, as was said, the life of it, that which is principally intended in it. The prophet calls it his standing upon his watch-tower and watching to see what God would speak to him, Hab. 2 : 1. namely, in answer to the prayer which he put up in his trouble. He is now waiting in expectation of an answer from God. And this is that to which poor, weak, trembling sinners are so encouraged, "Strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say unto them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not, behold your God will come." Isaiah, 35 : 3, 4. Weakness and discouragements are the effects of unbelief. These he would have removed with an expectation of the coming of God to the soul, according to the promise. And this I say belongs to the waiting of the soul in the condition described. Such a one expects that God will, in his season, manifest himself and his love to him, and give him an experimental sense of a blessed interest in forgiveness. And the accomplishment of this purpose and promise of God, he looks out after continually. He will not despond and be heartless, but stir up and strengthen himself to a full expectation to have the desires of his soul satisfied in due time; as we find David doing in places almost innumerable.

This is the duty that in the first place is recommended to the soul which is persuaded that there is forgiveness with God, but sees not its own interest therein. Wait on the Lord. And it has two properties,

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when it is duly performed; namely, *patience* and *perseverance*. By the one, men are kept to the length of God's time; by the other, they are preserved to the extent of their own duty.

And this is what was laid down in the third proposition drawn from the words; namely, That continuance in watching until God appears to the soul, is *necessary*, as that without which we cannot attain what we look after; and *prevailing*, as that wherein we shall never fail.

God is not to be limited, nor his time prescribed to him. We know our way, and the end of our journey; but our stations of especial rest we must wait for at his mouth, as the people did in the wilderness. When David comes to God in his great distress he says, "O Lord, thou art my God, my times are in thine hand." Psalm 31 : 14, 15. His times of trouble and of peace, of darkness and of light, he acknowledged to be in the hand and at the disposal of God; so that it was his duty to wait His time and season for his share and portion in them.

During this state the soul meets with much opposition and many difficulties and perplexities, especially if its darkness be of long continuance: as with some it abides many years, with some all the days of their lives. Their hope being hereby deferred, makes their hearts sick, and their spirits often faint; and this fainting is a defect in waiting, for want of perseverance and continuance frustrates the end. So David, "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord." Psalm 27 : 13. Had I not received support by faith, I had fainted. What was this fainting? It was a relinquishment of waiting on God, as he manifests by the

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exhortation which he gives to himself and others: "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart; wait, I say, on the Lord." ver. 14. Wait with courage and resolution, that thou faint not. And the apostle puts the blessed event of faith and obedience upon the avoidance of this evil: "We shall reap, if we faint not." Gal. 6 : 9. Hence we have both encouragement given against it, and promises that in the way of God we shall not be overtaken with it. "Consider the Lord Christ," saith the apostle, "the Captain of your salvation, lest ye be wearied, and faint in your minds." Heb. 12 : 3. Nothing else can cause you to come short of the mark aimed at. "They," saith the prophet, "who wait on the Lord," that is, in the use of the means by him appointed, "shall not faint." Isaiah, 40 : 31.

This continuace in waiting, then,

1. Is *necessary*. They that watch for the morning, to whose frame and actings the waiting of the soul for God is compared, give not over until the light appears; or if they do, if they are wearied and faint, and so cease watching, all their former pains will be lost, and they lie down in disappointment. So will it be with the soul that deserts its watch, and faints in its waiting. If, on the eruption of new lusts or corruptions; if, on the return of old temptations or the assaults of new ones; if, on a revived perplexing sense of guilt, or on the tediousness of working and laboring so much and so long in the dark, the soul begins to say in itself, I have looked for light, and behold darkness; for peace, and yet trouble cometh; the summer is past, the harvest is ended, and I am not relieved; such and such blessed means

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have been enjoyed, and yet I have not attained rest, and so gives over its waiting on God, it will at length utterly fail and come short of the grace aimed at. "Thou hast labored and hast not fainted" brings the reward. Rev. 2 : 3.

2. Perseverance in waiting is assuredly *prevalent:* and this renders it a necessary part of the duty itself. If we continue to wait for the vision of peace, it will come, it will not tarry, but answer our expectation of it. Never soul perished that abode in this duty to the end. The joys of heaven may sometimes come before settled consolation in this life; God sometimes gives in the full harvest without sending the first-fruits aforehand, but spiritual and eternal peace and rest is the infallible end of permanent waiting on God.

This is the duty that the Psalmist declares himself to be engaged in, on the encouraging discovery which was made him of forgiveness in God. "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared: I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope." And this is what in a similar state is required of us. This is the great direction which was given us in the example and practice of the Psalmist, as to our duty and deportment in the condition described. This was the way whereby he rose out of his depths and escaped out of his entanglements. And is any reader in these depths? Let him hence draw directions in duty.

1. Encourage your soul unto waiting on God. Do new fears arise, do old alarms continue? say unto your soul, "Yet wait on God; why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in

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God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." So the Psalmist speaks elsewhere: "Wait on God and be of good courage;" shake off sloth, rouse up yourself from under despondencies, let not fears prevail. This is the only way for success, and it will assuredly be prevalent. Oppose this resolution to every discouragement, and it will give new life to faith and hope: say, "My flesh faileth, and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever," as Psalm 73: 26. Though thy perplexed thoughts have even wearied and worn out the outward man, as in many they do, so that flesh faileth; and though thou hast no refreshing evidence from within, from thyself or thy own experience, so that thy heart faileth; yet resolve to look to God, there is strength in him, and satisfaction in him, for the whole man: he is a rock and a portion. This will strengthen things which otherwise will be ready to die. This will keep life in thy course, and stir thee up to plead with God in an acceptable season, when he will be found. Job wrought up his condition to a supposition that God might slay him; that is, add one stroke, one rebuke unto another, till he was consumed; and so take him out of the world in darkness and in sorrow. Yet he resolved to trust, to hope, to wait on him, as knowing that he should not utterly fail in so doing.

This frame the church expresses so admirably, that nothing can be added thereto. "Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace. I forgat prosperity. And I said my strength and my hope is perished from the Lord; remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in re-

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membrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good to them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." Lam. 3: 17–26. We have here both the condition and the duty fully expressed. The condition is sad and bitter, the soul is in depths, far from peace and rest. ver. 17. In this state it is ready utterly to faint, and to give up all for lost, both strength for the present and hopes for the future. verse 18. This makes its condition full of sorrow and bitterness, and its own thoughts become like wormwood and gall. verses 19, 20. But does he lie down under the burden of all this trouble? does he despond, and give over? No, saith he, I call to mind that there is forgiveness with God, grace, mercy, goodness for the relief of distressed souls, such as are in my condition. ver. 21–23. Thence the conclusion is, that as all help is to be looked for, all relief expected from him alone, so it is good that a man should quietly wait, and hope for the salvation of God. This he stirs up himself to, as the best, as the most blessed course for his deliverance.

2. Remember that *diligent use of the means*, for the end aimed at, is a necessary ingredient of waiting on God. Take in the consideration of this direction also. Do not think to be freed from your entanglements by restless, heartless desiring that it were otherwise with you: means are to be used, that relief may be obtained.

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What those means are, is known to all: mortification of sin, prayer, meditation, due attendance on all gospel-ordinances; conferring in general about spiritual things; advising in particular about our own state with those who, having received the tongue of the learned, are able to speak a word in season to them that are weary. And in all these are diligence and perseverance to be exercised; or in vain shall men desire a delivery from their entanglements.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WAITING ON GOD ONLY.

We have seen what is the duty intended in the proposition, that God is the proper object of the soul's waiting in its distresses and depths. We are next to consider the reason of it: why this is the first and principal duty of souls who in their depths have it discovered unto them that there is forgiveness with God; and the reason is, as expressed in our second observation above,

That the proper object of a sin-distressed soul's waiting and expectation, is GOD HIMSELF AS REVEALED IN CHRIST. I have, saith the Psalmist, waited for Jehovah: it is not this or that mercy or grace, this or that help or relief; but it is Jehovah himself that I wait for. And here we must show in what sense God himself is the

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object of the waiting soul; and then how it appears that waiting on him is so necessary a duty.

It is not grace, mercy, or relief absolutely considered, but *the God of all grace* that is the full adequate object of the soul's waiting and expectation; only herein he is not considered absolutely in his own nature, but as there is forgiveness with him through Jesus Christ. As in him he hath found a ransom, and accepted the atonement for sinners in his blood; as he is a God in covenant, so he is himself the object of our desire.

All troubles, depths, entanglements, arise from the absence of God from the soul; and from his displeasure.

The absence of God from the soul, by his departure, withdrawing, or hiding himself from it, is that which principally casts it into depths: "Wo unto them," saith the Lord, "when I depart from them." Hos. 9:12. And this wo, this sorrow attends not only a universal, a total departure of God from the soul, but a departure which is gradual or partial in some things, in some seasons. When God withdraws his enlightening, his refreshing, his comforting presence, as to any ways or means whereby he hath formerly communicated himself unto the souls of any, then wo to them, sorrow comes upon them, and they fall into depths and entanglements. Now, this condition calls for earnest waiting on God. If God be withdrawn, if he hides himself, what hath the soul to do but to wait for his return? So saith the prophet: "I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him." Isaiah, 8:17. If God hide himself, this is the natural and proper duty of the soul, to wait and to look for him: other courses of relief it cannot apply itself to. What

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that waiting is, and in what it consists, has been shown. Patient seeking of God in the ways of his appointment, is comprised in it: this the prophet expresses in that saying, "I will look for him;" it is indeed the same in the original with that in the psalm: "I will earnestly look out after him, with expectation of his return unto me."

A sense of God's displeasure is another cause of these depths and troubles, and of the continuance of the soul in them, notwithstanding it has made a blessed discovery by faith, that there is with him forgiveness. It all has respect to sin; and the reason of the trouble that arises from sin, is because of the displeasure of God against it. What then is the proper posture and frame of the sinner towards God as displeased? Shall he contend with him? shall he harden himself against him? shall he despise his wrath and contemn his threatenings? or shall he hide himself from him, so to avoid the effects of his wrath? Who knows not how ruinous and pernicious to the soul such courses would be, and how many are ruined by them every day? Patient waiting on him is the soul's only resource.

This duty flows also from *the greatness and sovereignty* of Him with whom we have to do: "My soul waiteth for Jehovah." Indeed, waiting is a duty that depends on the distance between the persons concerned in it, namely, he that waiteth and he that is waited on; so the Psalmist teaches us, Psalm 123:2. And the greater this distance is, the more cogent are the reasons of the duty on all occasions. And because we are practically averse to the performance of this duty, or at least quickly grow weary of it, notwithstanding our full con-

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victions of its necessity, I shall a little insist on some such considerations of God and ourselves as may not only evince the necessity of this duty, but so satisfy us of its reasonableness that we may be engaged to it and preserved in it.

Two things to this purpose we may consider in God, in Jehovah, whom we are to wait for: 1. His being, and the absolute and essential properties of his nature; 2. Those attributes of his nature which respect his dealing with us; both which are suited to beget in us affections and a frame of spirit according with the duty proposed.

I. Let us consider *the glorious Being of Jehovah*, with his absolute incommunicable essential excellences; and then try whether it does not become us in every condition to wait for him, and especially in that under consideration. This course God himself took with Job to recover him from his discontents and complaints, to reduce him to quietness and waiting. He sets before him his own glorious greatness as manifested in the works of his power, that thereby, being convinced of his own ignorance, weakness and infinite distance in all things from him, he might humble his soul into the most submissive dependence on him and waiting for him. And such was the result: "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Job, 42:6. His soul now comes to be willing to be at God's disposal, and therein he found present rest and a speedy healing of his condition. It is the "high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy," Isa. 57:15, with whom we have to do: he that "sitteth upon the circle of the

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earth, and the inhabitants of it are as grasshoppers before him; yea, the nations are as the drop of the bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: he taketh up the isles as a very little thing; all nations before him are as nothing, they are counted unto him less than nothing, and vanity." Isa. 40: 15, 17, 22. To what and doth the Lord thus set forth and declare his glorious greatness and power? It is that all might be brought to trust in him and wait for him, as at large declared in the close of the chapter. For shall grasshoppers, a drop of the bucket, dust of the balance, things less than nothing, repine against or wax weary of the will of the immense, glorious and lofty One? He that taketh up the isles as a very little thing may surely, if he please, destroy or forsake one isle, one city in an isle, one person in a city; and we are before him but single persons.

Serious thoughts of this infinite, all-glorious Being, will either quiet our souls or overwhelm them. All our weariness of his dispensations towards us arises from secret imaginings that he is such a one as ourselves; one that is to do nothing but what seems good in our eyes. But if we cannot comprehend his being, we cannot make rules to judge of his ways and proceedings. And how small a portion is it that we know of God! The nearest approaches of our reason and imagination leave us still at an infinite distance from him; and indeed we know not well the import of what we speak of his greatness; we only declare our respect to that which we believe and adore, but are not able to comprehend. All our thoughts come as far short of his excellent greatness as our natures do of his—that is, infi-

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nitely. Behold the universe, the glorious fabric of heaven and earth! how little is it that we know of its beauty, order and design! yet was it all the product of the word of his mouth; and with the same facility can he, when he pleaseth, reduce it to its primitive nothing. And what are we poor worms of the earth, an inconsiderable unknown part of the lower series and order of the works of his hands, few in number, fading in condition, disregarded even by most of our fellow-creatures, that we should withdraw ourselves from under his dealings with us, or be weary of waiting for his pleasure! This he presses on us: "Be still, and know that I am God." Psalm 46: 10. Let there be no more repinings, no more disputings; continue waiting in silence and patience; consider who I am: "Be still, and know that I am God."

Further, to help us in this consideration, let us direct our minds towards some of the glorious, essential, incommunicable properties of his nature distinctly: as,

1. *His eternity.* This Moses proposes, to bring the souls of believers to submission, trust and waiting: "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God." Psalm 90: 2. One that hath his being and subsistence, not in a duration of time, but in eternity itself. So doth Habbakkuk also: "My Lord, my God, my holy One, art thou not from everlasting?" Hab. 1: 12. And hence he draws his conclusion against making haste in any condition, and for tarrying and waiting for God. The like consideration is managed by David also. Psalm 102: 27. How inconceivable is this glorious, divine property to the thoughts and minds of men! how weak are the ways and terms whereby they go about to express it!

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One says, it is a *nunc stans*;* another, that it is a perpetual duration. He that says most only signifies what he knows of what it is not. We are of yesterday, change every moment, and are leaving our station to-morrow. God is still the same from eternity. And now I cannot conceive what I have said, but only have intimated what I adore. The whole duration of the world, from the beginning unto the end, takes up no space in this eternity of God: for how long soever it hath continued or may yet continue, it will all amount but to so many thousand years—so long a time, and time hath no place in eternity. And for us who have in this matter to do with God, what is our continuance to that of the world? a moment, as it were, in comparison. When men's lives were of old prolonged beyond the continuance of empires or kingdoms now, yet this was the winding up of all—such an one lived so many years, "and he died." Gen. 5. And what are we poor worms, whose lives are measured by inches, in comparison of their span? what are we before the eternal God, God always immutably subsisting in his own infinite being? A real consideration of these things will subdue the soul into a condition of dependence on him, and of waiting for him.

2. The *immensity* of his essence, and his *omnipresence*, should be in like manner considered. "Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." Jer. 23: 24. "The heavens, even the heaven of heavens," the supreme and most comprehensive created thing, cannot contain him, saith Solomon. In his infinitely glorious being he is present with all places, things, times, all the works of

* Now remaining, continuing as before.

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his hands; and is no less gloriously subsisting where they are not. God is where heaven and earth are not, no less than where they are; where there is no place, no space, real or imaginary, God is, for place and imagination have nothing to do with immensity; and he is present every where in the creation: where I am writing, where you are reading; he is present with you. The thoughts of men's hearts for the most part are, that God, as to his essence, is in heaven only: and it is well if some think he is there, seeing they live and act as if there were neither God nor devil but themselves. But, on these apprehensions, such thoughts are ready secretly to arise and effectually to prevail, as Job expressed, "How doth God know? can he judge through the dark? Thick clouds are as a covering unto him, that he seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of the heavens." Job, 22: 13, 14. Apprehensions of God's distance from men harden them in their ways: but he is all around them; God is every where; and a man may, on all occasions, say with Jacob, "God is in this place, and I knew it not." Let the soul, then, who is thus called to wait on God, exercise itself with thoughts about this immensity of his nature and being. Comprehend it, fully understand it we never can; but the consideration of it will impress such awe of his greatness upon our hearts that we shall learn to tremble before him, and be willing to wait for him in all things.

3. Thoughts of *the holiness of God*, or the infinite purity of this eternal immense Being, are singularly useful to the same end. This is what Eliphaz affirms that he received by vision, to reply to the complaint and impatience of Job. After he has declared his vision

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with the manner of it, this he affirms to be the revelation that by voice was made to him: "Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker? Behold, he putteth no trust in his servants, and his angels he chargeth with folly. How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before the moth!" Job, 4 : 12–19. If the saints and angels in heaven do not answer this infinite holiness of God in their most perfect condition, is it meet for worms of the earth to suppose that any thing which proceeds from him is not absolutely holy and perfect, and so best for them? This is the fiery property of the nature of God, whence he is called a consuming fire, and everlasting burnings: and the law, on which he hath impressed some representation of it, is called a fiery law, as that which will consume and burn up whatever is perverse and evil. Hence the prophet, who had a representation of the glory of God in a vision, and heard the seraphim proclaiming his holiness, cried out, "Wo is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips." Isaiah, 6 : 5. He thought it impossible that he should bear that near approach of the holiness of God. And with the remembrance of this Joshua stilled the people with the terror of the Lord. Joshua, 24 : 19. Let such souls, then, as are under troubles and perplexities on any account, endeavor to exercise their thoughts about this infinite purity and holiness of God; they will quickly find it their wisdom to become as weaned children before him, and content themselves with what he shall guide them to, which is to wait for him. This fiery holiness streams from his throne, Dan. 7 : 10, and

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would quickly consume the whole creation, as now under the curse and sin, were it not for the interposing of Jesus Christ.

4. *His glorious majesty*, as the Ruler of all the world. Majesty relates to government, and it calls us to such an awe of him as renders our waiting for him comely and necessary. God's throne is said to be in heaven, and there principally do the glorious beams of his terrible majesty shine forth. But he has also made some representation of it on the earth, that we might learn to fear before him. Such was the appearance of his glory in the giving of the law, whereby he will judge the world, and condemn the transgressors of it, who obtain not an acquittance in the blood of Jesus Christ. See the description of it in Exod. 19 : 16, 18. "So terrible was the sight hereof, that Moses himself said, I exceedingly fear and quake." Heb. 12 : 21. And what effect it had upon all the people is declared, Exod. 20 : 18, 19. They were not able to bear it, although they had good assurance that it was for their benefit that he so drew nigh and manifested his glory to them.

Are we not satisfied with our condition? cannot we wait under his present dispensations? Let us think how we may approach his presence, or stand before his glorious majesty. Will not the dread of his excellency fall upon us? Will not his terror make us afraid? Shall we not think his way best, and his time best, and that our duty is to be silent before him? And such manifestation has he made of his glory, as the great Judge of all, on the throne, to sundry of the prophets; as to Isaiah, chap. 6 : 1–4; to Ezekiel, chap. 1; to Daniel, chap. 7 : 9, 10; to John, Rev. 1. Read these places

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attentively, and learn to tremble before him. These are not things that are foreign to us. This God is our God. The same throne of his greatness and majesty is still established in the heavens. Let us, then, in the hastes and heats to which our spirits in any condition are prone, present ourselves before this throne of God, and then consider what will be best for us to say or do; what frame of heart and spirit will become us, and be safest for us. All this glory encompasses us every moment, though we perceive it not. And it will be but a few days before all the veils and shades that are about us shall be taken away and depart. And then shall all this glory appear to us, to our endless bliss or everlasting wo. Let us therefore know, that nothing in our dealings with him doth better become us, than silently to wait for him, and for what he will speak to us in our depths and straits.

5. It is good to consider *the illustrations God has given* of his infinite greatness, power, majesty and glory. Such was his mighty work of creating all things out of nothing. We dwell on molehills in the earth, and yet we know but the least part of the excellency of that spot of ground which is given us for our habitation here below. But what is it to the whole habitable world, and the fulness thereof! And what an amazing thing is its greatness, with the wide and large sea, and all sorts of creatures therein! The least of these hath a beauty, a glory, an excellency, that the utmost of our inquiries end in admiring. And all this is but the earth, the lower depressed part of the creation. What shall we say concerning the heavens over us, and all those creatures of light that have their habitation in them? Who can con-

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ceive their beauty, order, use, and course? The consideration hereof caused the Psalmist to cry out, "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent and glorious art thou!" Psalm 8 : 1. And what is the rise, spring, and cause of these things? Are they not all the effect of the word of the power of this glorious God? And doth he not in them, and by them, speak us into a reverence of his greatness?

The same also may be said concerning the mighty and strange works of Providence in the rule of the world. Is not this he who brought the flood of old upon the world of ungodly men? Is not this he who consumed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire from heaven, setting them forth as examples to those that should afterwards live ungodly, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire? Is it not he who destroyed Egypt with his plagues, and drowned Pharaoh with his host in the Red Sea? Is it not he, one of whose servants slew a hundred and fourscore and five thousand in Sennacherib's army in one night? who opened the earth to swallow up Dathan and Abiram? and sent out fire from the altar to devour Nadab and Abihu? And have not all ages been filled with such instances of his greatness and power?

The end why I have insisted on these things, is to show the reasonableness of the duty we are pressing: to wait on God quietly and patiently in every condition of distress. For what else becomes us when we have to do with this great and holy One?

II. This waiting for God respects the whole of the condition expressed in the psalm; and this contains not

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only spiritual depths about sin, of which we have largely spoken, but also providential depths, depths of trouble or affliction, that we may be exercised with in the holy, wise providence of God. In reference also to these, waiting in patience and silence is our duty.

And there are two considerations that will assist us in this duty when in depths of trouble or affliction. And the first of these is, the consideration of those attributes of God which he exercises in an especial manner in all his dealings with us, and which in all our troubles we are principally to regard. The second is, the consideration of ourselves, what we are, and what we have deserved.

Let us begin with the ATTRIBUTES OF GOD DISPLAYED TOWARD US.

1. *His sovereignty.* This he declares, this we are to acknowledge and submit to, in all the great and dreadful dispensations of his providence in his dealings with our souls. May he not do what he will with his own? Who shall say unto him, What doest thou? Or if men will do so, what shall give them countenance in their so doing? He made all this world of nothing, and could have made all things quite otherwise than they are. It would not subsist one moment without his omnipotent support. Nothing would be continued in its place, course or use, without his effectual influence. If any thing can be, live, or act a moment without him, we may take free leave to dispute its disposal with him, and haste to the accomplishment of our desires; but, from the angels in heaven to the worms of the earth and the grass of the field, all depend on him and his power continually. Why was this part of the creation

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an angel, that a worm, this a man, that a brute? Is it from their own choice, designing or contrivance, or brought about by their own wisdom? Or is it merely from the sovereign pleasure and will of God? And what madness it is to repine against what he does, seeing all things are as he makes them, and disposes them; nor can be otherwise: even the repiner himself has his being and subsistence upon his mere pleasure.

This sovereignty of God Elihu pleads in his dealing with Job, chap. 33: 8–11. He apprehended that Job had reasoned against God's severe dispensations towards him, and that he did not humble himself under his mighty hand wherewith he was exercised, nor wait for him in a due manner; and therefore what does he propose to him to bring him to his duty? what does he reply to his reasonings and complaints? "Behold in this thou art not just: I will answer thee; God is greater than man." ver. 12. "Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters." ver. 13. "Be it that in other things thou art just and innocent, that thou art free from the things wherewith thy friends have charged thee; yet in this thou art not just; it is neither just nor equal that any man should complain of, or repine against any of God's dispensations: yea, I will suppose these dealings of God are very grievous, very dreadful, such as he has, it may be, scarcely exercised towards any from the foundation of the world; to be utterly destroyed and consumed in a day, in all relations and enjoyments, and that at a time when no such thing was looked for or provided against; to have a sense of sin revived on the conscience after pardon obtained, be the affliction what it may, yet if

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thou complainest, thou art not just." And what reason does he give? Why, God is greater than man; infinitely so, in power and sovereign glory; he is so absolute that he giveth no account of any of his matters; and what folly, what injustice is it to complain of his proceedings! Consider his absolute dominion over the works of his hands, over thyself and all that thou hast; his infinite distance from thee, and greatness above thee, and then see whether it be just or not to repine against what he doeth. And he presses the same considerations in chap. 34: 18, 19. If, when kings and princes rule in righteousness, it is a contempt of their authority to say to them they are wicked and ungodly, wilt thou then speak against him, contend with him "that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor; for they are all the work of his hands?" And ver. 29. "When he giveth quietness, who can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who can behold him? whether it be done against a nation or against a man only." Whatever God doeth, and towards whomsoever, be they many or few, a whole nation or city, or one single person, be they high or low, rich or poor, good or bad, all are the works of his hands; and he may deal with them as seems good unto him. And this man alone, as God afterwards declares, made use of the right and pro per means to take off Job from complaining, to com pose his spirit to rest and peace, and to bring him to wait patiently for God: for whereas his other friends injuriously charged him with hypocrisy, and that he had in an especial manner above other men deserved those judgments of God which he was exercised with;

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he who was conscious of his own integrity was only provoked and exasperated by their arguings, and stirred up to plead his own uprightness. But this man, allowing him the plea of his integrity, calls him to the consideration of the greatness and sovereignty of God, against which there is no rising up. And to this God himself afterwards calls him.

Deep and serious thoughts of God's sovereignty and absolute dominion or authority over all the works of his hands, are effectual means to bring the soul to this duty. Yea, this is that which we are to bring our souls to. Let us consider with whom we have to do; are not we and all our concerns in his hands, as the clay in the hand of the potter? and may he not do what he will with his own? shall we call him to an account? is not what he does good and holy, because he does it? Do any repining thoughts against the works of God arise in our hearts? are any complaints ready to break out of our mouths? Let us lay our hands on our hearts, and our mouths in the dust, with thoughts of his greatness and absolute sovereignty, and it will work our whole souls into a better frame.

And this extends to the manner, time, and season of all things whatever. As in earthly things: if God will bring a dreadful judgment of fire upon a people, a nation: Ah! why must it be London? If on London, why so terrible, raging, and unconquerable? why the city, not the suburbs? why my house, not my neighbor's? why had such a one help, and I none? All these things are wholly to be referred to God's sovereign pleasure; there alone can the soul of man find rest and peace. It is so in spiritual dispensations also.

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Thus Aaron, on the sudden death of his two eldest sons, being reminded by Moses of God's sovereignty and holiness, immediately held his peace, or quietly humbled himself under his mighty hand. Lev. 10 : 3, 4 And David, when things were brought into extreme confusion by the rebellion of Absalom, followed by the ungodly multitude of the whole nation, relinquishes all other arguments and pleas and complaints in a resignation of himself and all his concerns to the absolute pleasure of God. 2 Sam. 15 : 25, 26. To this in all our extremities must we bring our souls before we can attain any rest or peace, or the least comfortable persuasion that we may not yet fall under greater severities in the just indignation of God against us.

2. *The wisdom* of God is also to be considered and submitted to. "He is wise in heart; who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered?" Job, 9 : 4. This the prophet joins with his greatness and sovereignty. Isaiah, 40 : 12–14. "There is no searching of his understanding." ver. 28. And the apostle closes all his consideration of the works of God in a holy admiration of his knowledge and wisdom, whence his judgment becomes "unsearchable, and his ways past finding out." Rom. 11 : 33, 34. He seeth and knoweth all things, in all their causes, effects, consequences and circumstances, in their utmost reach and tendency, in their correspondences one to another, and suitableness to his own glory, and so alone judgeth aright of all things. The wisest of men, as David speaks, walk in a shade. We see little, we know little, and that but of a very few things, and in an imperfect manner; and of their present appearances, abstracted from their ends, and relations to other things. And

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if we would be further wise in the works of God, we shall be found to be like the wild ass's colt. What is good for us or the church of God, what is evil to it or us, we know not at all; but all things are open and naked to God.

The day will come, indeed, in which we shall have such a prospect of the works of God, see one thing so set against another as to find goodness, beauty, and order in them all; that they were all done in number, weight, and measure; that nothing could have been otherwise, without an abridgment of his glory and the disadvantage of them that believe in him. But for the present all our wisdom consists in referring all to him. He who does these things is infinitely wise; he knows what he does, and why, and what will be the end of all. We are apt, it may be, to think at such seasons that all things will go to wreck in respect to ourselves, the church, or the whole world: how can this breach be repaired, this loss made up, this ruin recovered? Peace is gone, trade is gone, our substance is gone, the church is gone, all is gone, confusion and utter desolation lie at the door. If a man who is unskilled and inexperienced should be at sea, it may be, every time the vessel seems to decline on either side he would be apt to conceive they should be all cast away; but yet, if he be not childishly timorous, when the captain shall tell him there is no danger, bid him trust to his skill and it shall be well with him, it will yield quietness and satisfaction. We are indeed in a storm, the whole earth seems to reel and stagger like a drunken man; but yet our souls may rest in the infinite skill and wisdom of the great Pilot of the whole creation, who directs all things according to the

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counsel of his will: "His works are manifold; in wisdom hath he made them all," Psalm 104 : 24, and in the same wisdom does he dispose of them: "All these things come forth from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Isaiah, 28 : 29. What is good, meet, useful for us, for ours, for the churches, for the city, for the land of our nativity, he only knows, and of creatures not one. To this infinite wisdom of God are we therefore to resign and submit ourselves: his hand in all his works is guided by infinite wisdom. In thoughts thereof, in humbling ourselves thereto, shall we find rest and peace.

3. *The righteousness* of God is also to be considered. That term in Scripture is used to denote many excellences of God, all which are reducible to the infinite rectitude of his nature. I intend, at present, that which is called his righteousness in rule or government. This is remembered by Abraham, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Gen. 18 : 25. And by the apostle, "Is God unjust, who taketh vengeance? God forbid." This our souls are to own in all the works of God. They are all righteous; the works of Him who will do no iniquity, whose throne is established in judgment. However they may be dreadful, grievous, and seem severe, yet they are all righteous. It is true, he will sometimes rise up and do strange acts, strange works, Isaiah, 28 : 21; such as he will not do often, nor ordinarily; such as shall fill the world with dread and amazement. He will answer his people in terrible things; but yet all shall be in righteousness. And to complain of that which is righteous, to repine against it, is the highest unrighteousness. Faith, then, fixing the soul on the righteous-

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ness of God, is an effectual means to humble it under his mighty hand.

God judgeth not as man judgeth. We judge by the seeing of the eye and hearing of the ear, according to outward appearances and evidences; but God searcheth the heart. We judge upon what is between man and man, God principally upon what is between himself and man. And what do we know or understand of these things? what is there in the hearts of men, what purposes, what contrivances, what designs, what corrupt affections, what sins, what transactions have been between God and them; what warnings he hath given them, what reproofs, what engagements they have made, what convictions they have had; to what use they were putting their lives, their substance, their families? Alas! we know nothing of these things, and so are able to make no judgment of the proceedings of God upon them; but this we know, that he is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works, yea, in the most terrible of them. And when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, ah! how glorious will be his drowning of the old world, firing of Sodom, swallowing up of Dathan and Abiram in the earth; the utter rejection of the Jews, with all other acts of his providence seeming to be accompanied with severity! And so will he be glorious in our own trials, inward or outward.

God is Judge *of all the world, all ages, times, places, persons;* and disposes of all, so that they may tend to the good of the whole and his own glory in the universe. Our thoughts are bounded, much more our observations and ability to measure things, within a very small compass. Every thing stands alone to us, where-

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by we see little of its beauty or order, and do not know how it ought justly to be disposed of. That particular may seem deformed to us, which to His eye, who sees all at once, past, present and to come, with all those joints and bands of wisdom and order by which things are related to one another, is beautiful and glorious. For as nothing is of itself, nor by itself, nor to itself, so nothing stands alone; there is a line of mutual influence that runs through the creation and every particular of it, and that in all its changes and alterations from the beginning to the end, which gives it its loveliness, life and order. He that can at once see but one part of a goodly statue or colossus might think it a very deformed piece, when he that views it altogether is assured of its due proportion, symmetry and loveliness. Now, all things, ages and persons, all thus at once are naked to the sight of God, and he disposes them with respect to the whole, that every one may fill its own place, and sustain its part and share in the common tendency of all to the same end.

And hence it is that in public judgments and calamities God often suffers the godly to be involved with the wicked, and that not on account of their own persons, but as they are parts of the community which he will destroy. This Job expresses somewhat harshly; but there is truth in this assertion, "This is one thing, therefore I said it, he destroyeth the righteous with the wicked. If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent." chap. 9:22, 23. God in public desolations often takes good and bad together; a sudden scourge involves them all. And this God does for sundry reasons; as,

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That he may manifest *his own holiness;* which is such that he can without the least injustice or oppression, even on account of their own provocations, take away the houses, possessions, estates, liberties and lives of the best of his own saints. For how should a man, any man, the best of men, be just with God if he would contend with him? No man can answer to him one of a thousand. Job, 9 : 3. This they will also acknowledge: on account of righteousness none can open his mouth about his judgments without the highest impiety and wickedness.

He does so that his own people may learn to know his terror, and to rejoice always before him with trembling. Therefore Job affirms that in the time of his prosperity he was not secure, but still trembled in himself with thoughts of the judgments of God. Doubtless much wretched carnal security would be ready to invade and possess the hearts of believers, if God should always and constantly pass them by in the dispensation of his public judgments.

Such judgments also become a stone of offence and a stumbling-block *to wicked men*, who are to be hardened in their sins and prepared for ruin. When they see that all things fall alike unto all, and that those who have made the strictest profession of the name and fear of God fare no better than themselves, they are encouraged to despise the warnings of God and the strokes of his hand, and so to rush on to destruction.

God does it to proclaim to all the world that *what he does here is no final judgment* and ultimate determination concerning things and persons. For who can see the wise man dying as the fool, the righteous and holy

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perishing in their outward concerns as the ungodly and wicked, but must conclude that the righteous God, the Judge of all, has appointed another day wherein all things must be called over again, and every one then receive his final award, according as his works shall appear to have been. Thus are we to humble ourselves to the righteousness with which the hand of God is always accompanied.

His goodness and grace is also to be considered in all the works of his mighty hands. As there is no unrighteousness in him, so all is good and gracious; and whatever there is in any trouble, of allay from the utmost wrath, is of mere goodness and grace. Thy houses are burnt, but perhaps thy goods are saved; is there no grace, no goodness therein? or perhaps thy substance also is consumed, but yet thy person is alive; and should a living man complain? And say what thou wilt, this stroke is not hell, which thou hast deserved long ago; yea, it may be a means of preventing thy going thither. So this also is accompanied with infinite goodness, patience and mercy. And if the consideration will not quiet thy heart, take heed lest a worse thing befall thee.

These things, amongst others, are we to consider in God, to lead our hearts to acquiescence in his will, submission under his mighty hand, and a patient waiting for the issue.

II. Consider OUR MEAN AND ABJECT CONDITION, and our infinite distance from Him with whom we have to do. When Abraham, the father of the faithful and friend of God, came to treat with him about his judgments, he does it with the acknowledgment of his condition that

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he was mere dust and ashes. Gen. 18:27. A poor abject creature that God at his pleasure had formed out of the dust of the earth, and which in a few days was to be reduced again to dust. We can forget nothing more perniciously than what we are. "Man is a worm," saith Bildad, "and the son of man is a worm." Job, 25:6. And therefore says Job himself, "I have said to corruption, Thou art my father; and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister." chap. 17:14. His affinity, his relation to them is the nearest imaginable; he is no otherwise to be accounted of; and there is nothing that God abhors more than an elation of mind in the forgetfulness of our mean, frail condition. "Thou sayest," said he to the proud prince of Tyrus, "that thou art a god, but wilt thou say thou art a god in the hands of him that slays thee?" Ezek. 28:9. That severe conviction did God provide for his pride. Thou shalt be a man, and no god, in the hand of him that slays thee. And when Herod prided himself in the acclamations of the vain multitude, "It is the voice of God and not of a man," the angel of the Lord filled that god immediately with worms, which slew him and devoured him. Acts, 12:23.

There is indeed nothing more effectual to abase the pride of the thoughts of men than a due remembrance that they are so mean. Hence the Psalmist prays, Psalm 9:20, "Put them in fear, O Lord, that the nations may know themselves to be but men:" in the Hebrew, poor, miserable, frail, mortal man. What is man? What is his life? what is his strength? Said one—the dream of a shadow, a mere nothing; or as David better says, Every man living in his best condition is altogether va-

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nity, Psalm 39:5; and James, Our life (which is our best, our all) is but a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. chap. 4:14. But enough has been said by many on this subject. And we that have seen so many thousands each week in one city carried away to the grave, have been taught the truth of our frailty even as with thorns and briars.* But I know not how it comes to pass, there is not any thing we are more apt to forget than what we ourselves are: and this brings men into innumerable sins towards God and one another. Thou therefore that art exercised under the hand of God in any severe dispensation, and art ready on all occasions to fill thy mouth with complaints, sit down a little and take a right measure of thyself, and see whether this state of mind becomes thee. It is the great God against whom thou repinest, and thou art a man, and that is a name of a worm, a poor, frail, dying worm; and it may be, whilst thou art speaking thou art ready to drop in death. And wilt thou think it meet for such a one as thou art to magnify thyself against the great possessor of heaven and earth? Poor clay! poor dust and ashes! poor dying worm! know thy state and condition, and fall down quietly under the mighty hand of God. Though thou wranglest with men about thy concerns, let God alone. "The potsherds may contend with the potsherds of the earth; but wo unto him that striveth with his Maker."

Again, consider that in this frail condition we have al. greatly sinned against God. So did Job: "I have

* Referring to the plague of London, A. D. 1665, wherein 68,000 persons are computed to have died.

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sinned, what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?" Job, 7:20. If this consideration will not satisfy thy mind, yet it will assuredly stop the mouths of all the sons of men. Though all the curses of the law should be executed upon us, yet every mouth must be stopped, because all the world is become guilty before God. Rom. 3:19. "And why should a living man complain?" saith the prophet, Lam. 3:39. Why, it may be it is because that his trouble is great and inexpressible, and such as seldom or never befell any before him; but what then, saith he, "Shall a man complain of the punishment of his sins?" If this living man be a sinful man, as there is none that liveth and sinneth not, he has no ground of murmuring or complaint. For a sinful man to complain, especially whilst he is yet a living man, is most unreasonable. For,

1. Whatever has befallen us, it *is just*, because we are sinners before God; and to repine against the judgments of God, that are rendered evidently righteous on account of sin, is to anticipate the condition of the damned in hell, a great part of whose misery it is, that they always repine against the sentence and punishment which they know to be most righteous and holy. If it were now my design to treat of the sins of professors generally, how easy were it to stop the mouths of all men in respect to their troubles; but that is not my present business: I speak to particular persons, and that not with a special design to convince them of their sins, but to humble their souls. When our souls are ready to be entangled with the thoughts of any severe dispensation of God, and our own particular pressures, troubles, miseries occasioned thereby, let us look into our-

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selves and take a view every one of his own personal provocations. And when we have done so, see what we have to say to God, what we have to complain of: let the sinner speak. Is not God holy, righteous, wise in what he hath done? And if he be, why do we not subscribe unto his ways, and submit quietly unto his will?

2. But this is not all: we are not only such sinners as to render these dispensations of God evidently holy, these judgments of his righteous, but also to manifest that they are accompanied with unspeakable *patience, mercy and grace.* To instance in one particular: is it the burning of our houses, the spoiling of our goods, the ruin of our estates alone that our sins have deserved? If God had made the temporary fire on earth to have been to us a way of entrance into the eternal fire of hell, we had nothing of which righteously to complain. May we not then see a mixture of unspeakable patience, grace and mercy in every dispensation? and shall we then repine against it? Is it not a better advice, "Go and sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee?" For a sinner out of hell not to rest in the will of God, nor to humble himself under his mighty hand, is to make himself guilty of the especial sin of hell. Other sins deserve hell, but this repining against God is a prominent sin. The church comes to a blessed, quieting resolution in this case, Micah, 7:9; "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him;" bear it quietly, patiently, and submit under his hand.

3. Consider, that of ourselves *we are not able to make a right judgment* of what is best for us, or what tends most directly to our highest good. "Surely every man walketh in a vain show;" in the Hebrew, in an image

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full of false representations of things—in the midst of delusive appearances; so that he knows not what to choose or do aright, and therefore spends the most of his time and strength about things that are of no benefit to him. "Surely they are disquieted in vain;" and he gives one special instance: "he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them," Psalm 39:6, which is but one example of the manifold frustrations that men meet with in the whole course of their lives, as not knowing what is good for them. We all profess to aim at one chief, principal end; namely, the enjoyment of God in Christ as our eternal reward; and in order thereto, to be carried on in the use of the means of faith and obedience tending to that end. Now, if this be so, the suitableness or unsuitableness of all other things, as good or evil to us, is to be measured by their tendency to this end. And what know we of this? As to the things of this life, do we know whether it will be best for us to be rich or poor, to have houses or to be harborless, to abound or to want, to leave wealth and inheritance to our children, or leave them merely to the providence of God? Do we know what condition will most further our obedience, obviate our temptations, or call most on us to mortify our corruptions? And if we know nothing of these things, as indeed we do not, were it not best for us to leave them quietly to God's disposal? I doubt not but it will appear at the last day that a world of evil in the hearts of men was stifled by the destruction of their outward concerns; that many were delivered from temptations by it, who otherwise would have been overtaken to their ruin and the scandal of the Gospel; that many a secret imposthume has been

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lanced and cured by a stroke; for God does not send judgments on his own for judgment's sake, for punishment's sake, but always to accomplish some blessed design of grace towards them. And there is no one soul in particular, which shall rightly search itself and consider its state, but will be able to see wisdom, grace and care towards itself in all the dispensations of God. And if I would here enter upon the benefits that, through the sanctifying hand of God, redound to believers by afflictions, calamities, troubles, distresses, temptations and like effects of God's visitations, it would be of use to the souls of men in this case. But this subject has been so often and so well treated that I shall not here insist upon it. I desire only that we should seriously consider how utterly ignorant we are of what is good for us or useful to us in these outward things, and so leave them quietly to God's disposal.

4. We may consider that all these things about which we are troubled fall directly within the compass of that good word of God's grace, that he will make *all things* work together for the good of them that love him. Rom. 8:28. All things that we enjoy, all things that we are deprived of, all that we do, all that we suffer, our losses, troubles, miseries, distresses, which the apostle instances in the following verses, they shall all work together for good; together with one another, and all with and in subordination to the power, grace and wisdom of God. It may be, we see not how or by what means it shall be effected; but he is infinitely wise and powerful who hath undertaken it, and we know little or nothing of his ways. There is nothing that we have, or enjoy, or desire, but it has turned out to some to their

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hurt. Riches have been kept for men to their hurt; wisdom and high places have been the ruin of many; liberty and plenty are to most a snare; prosperity slays the foolish. And we are not of ourselves, in any measure, able to secure ourselves from the hurt and poison that is in any of these things, but that they may be our ruin also, as they have already been, and every day are, to multitudes of the children of men.

It is enough to fill the soul of any man with horror and amazement to consider the ways and plans of most of those who are intrusted with this world's goods. Is it not evident, that all their lives they seem industriously to take care that they may perish eternally? Luxury, riot, oppression, intemperance, and of late especially, blasphemy and atheism, they usually give up themselves to; and this is the fruit of their abundance and security. What now, if God should deprive us of all these things? Can any one certainly say that he is injured thereby? Might they not have turned to his everlasting perdition, as they do to thousands as good by nature, and who have had advantages to be as wise as we? And shall we complain of God's dispensations about them? And what shall we say, when he himself has undertaken to make all things work together for our good? Anxieties of mind and perplexities of heart about our losses, is not what we are called to in our trouble; but this is our duty: let us consider whether we love God or not, whether we are called according to his purpose; if so, all things are well in his hand, who can order them for our good and advantage. I hope many a poor soul will from hence, under every trouble, be able to say with him that was banished from

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his country, and found better entertainment elsewhere, "My friends, I had perished, if I had not perished:" had I not been undone by fire, it may be I had been ruined in eternal fire. God hath made all to work for my good.

Our design in all this is to evince the reasonableness of the duty of waiting on God, which we are pressing from the Psalmist's example. Ignorance of God and ourselves is the great cause of all our disquiet. And this arises mostly, not from want of light and instruction, but from want of consideration and application. The truths we have argued concerning God are obvious, are known to all; so are those concerning ourselves; but by whom are they employed or improved as they ought? The frame of our spirits is as though we stood upon equal terms with God, and thought, with Jonah, that we might do well to be angry with what he doeth. Did we rightly consider him, did we stand in awe of him as we ought, it had certainly been otherwise with us.

Having thus shown that Jehovah himself is the proper object of the soul's waiting in the condition described, I shall only add one direction how we may be enabled to perform and discharge this duty aright, which we have manifested to have been so necessary, so reasonable, so prevalent, for obtaining relief.

III. The word of promise is the soul's great support in waiting for God. So saith the Psalmist: "In his word do I hope;" that is, the word of promise. As the word in general is the adequate rule of all our obedience to God and communion with him; so there are especial parts of it suited to these especial actings of our souls towards him: thus the word of promise, or the

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promise in the word, is what our faith especially regards in our hope, trust, and waiting on God; and it is suited to answer to the immediate actings of our souls therein. From this word of promise, or in other words, the promise of God, the soul in its distresses takes encouragement to continue waiting on him.

The end and use of the promise is to declare, reveal, and make known God to believers, what is in an especial manner in him and concerning him, which may give them encouragement to wait for him.

The promises are *a declaration of the nature of God*, especially of his goodness, grace, and love. God has put an impression of all the glorious excellences of his nature in his word, especially as he is in Christ, in the word of the Gospel. There, as in a glass, do we behold his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. As his commands express to us his holiness and his threatenings, his righteousness and severity; so do his promises declare his goodness, grace, love and bounty. And in these things do we learn all that we truly know of God; that is, we know him in his word. The soul, therefore, that in this condition is waiting on God, or for God, considers the representation which he makes of himself and of his own nature in the promises, and receives support and encouragement in its duty. For if God teach us by the promises what he is, and what he will be to us, we have firm ground to expect from him all the fruits of benignity, kindness and love. Let the soul frame in itself the idea of God which is exhibited in the promises, and it will powerfully prevail with it to continue in an expectation of his gracious return; they all expressing goodness, love, patience, forbearance,

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long-suffering, pardoning mercy, grace, bounty, with a full satisfactory reward. This is the beauty of the Lord mentioned with admiration by the prophet: "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!" Zech. 9 : 17; which is the great attraction of the soul to adhere constantly to him. Whatever difficulties arise, whatever temptations interpose, or wearisomeness grows upon us in our straits, troubles, trials and desertions, let us not entertain such thoughts of God as our own perplexed imaginations may be apt to suggest. This would quickly cast us into a thousand complaints, misgivings and falls; but the remembrance of and meditation on God in his promises, as revealed by them, as expressed in them, is suited quite to other ends and purposes. There appears, yea, gloriously shines forth, that love, that wisdom, that goodness, tenderness and grace, which cannot but encourage a believing soul to abide in waiting for him.

2. The word of promise not only expresses God's nature, as that in which he proposes himself to the contemplation of faith, but it also declares his will and *purpose of acting towards the soul*, suitably to his own goodness and grace; for promises are the declarations of God's purpose and will to act towards believers in Christ Jesus according to the infinite goodness of his own nature, and this done in great variety, according to the various conditions and wants of those that believe. They all proceed from the same spring of infinite grace, but are branched into innumerable particular streams, according as our necessities require. To these do waiting souls repair for support and encouragement: their perplexities principally arise from their

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misapprehensions of what God is in himself, and of what he will be to them; and whither should they repair to be undeceived, but to that faithful representation which he has made of himself and his will in the word of his grace? "For no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." John, 1 : 18.

Now, the Gospel is nothing but the word of promise explained in all the springs, causes and effects of it; thither must we repair to be instructed in this matter. The imaginings and reasonings of men's hearts will but deceive them in these things. The instructions of other men may do so; nor have they any truth in them, further than they may be resolved into the word of promise. Here alone they may find rest and refreshment. The soul of whom we speak, is under troubles, perplexities, and distresses, as to its outward condition; pressed with many straits, it may be, on every hand; and as to its spiritual state, under various apprehensions as to the mind and will of God towards it, as has at large been explained. In this condition it is brought in some measure to a holy submission to God, and a patient waiting for the issue of its trials. In this state it has many temptations to, and much working of unbelief. The whole of its opposition amounts to this, that it is neglected of God; that its way is hid, and its judgment is passed over from him; that it shall not be at present delivered, nor hereafter saved. What course can any one advise such a one to for his relief, and to preserve his soul from fainting, or deserting the duty of waiting on God, but only this, to search and inquire what revelation God hath made of himself and his will

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in his word? And this the promise declares. Here he shall find hope, patience, faith, expectation, to be all increased, comforted, encouraged. Herein lies the duty and safety of any in their distresses. Men may bear the first impression of any trouble with the strength, courage and resolution of their natural spirits; they may for a time support themselves with former experiences, and other usual springs and means of consolation; but if their wounds prove difficult to be cured, if they despise ordinary remedies, if their diseases are of long continuance, this is that to which they must betake themselves: they must search into the word of promise, and learn to measure things, not according to the present state and apprehensions of their mind, but according to what God has declared concerning them. And there are great excellences in the promises, when hoped in or trusted in, that tend to the establishment of the soul in this duty of waiting on God.

The Divine grace contained in the promises: the good will of God in Christ, for help, relief, satisfaction, pardon and salvation, is *suited to all particular conditions and wants* of the soul. As light arises from the sun, and is diffused in the beams thereof to the especial use of all creatures, enabled by a seeing faculty to make use of it; so cometh grace forth from the eternal good-will of God in Christ, and is diffused by the promises, with a blessed suitableness to the condition and wants of all believers. There can nothing fall out between God and any soul, but there is grace suited to it in one promise or another, as clearly and evidently as if it were given to the individual particularly and immediately. This they find by experience, who at any

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time are enabled to mix effectually a promise with faith.

The word of promise has a wonderful, mysterious, special *impression of God upon it.* By it he secretly and ineffably communicates himself to believers. When God appeared in a dream to Jacob, he awaked and said, "God is in this place, and I knew it not." He knew God was every where, but an intimation of his especial presence surprised him: so is a soul surprised, when God opens himself and his grace in a promise unto him. It cries out, God is here, and I knew it not. Such a near approach of God in his grace it finds, as is accompanied with a refreshing surprisal.

There is a *special engagement of the truth of God* in every promise. Grace and truth are the two ingredients of an evangelical promise. I cannot now stay to show wherein this special engagement of truth in the promise consists. Besides, it is a thing known and confessed; but it has a special influence to support the soul, when hoped in, in its duty of waiting: for that hope can never make ashamed, or leave the soul to disappointment, which stays itself on Divine veracity under a special engagement.

This is the duty which the Psalmist engages himself in, as the only way to obtain a comfortable interest in forgiveness with God, and all its gracious effects.

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CHAPTER XIX.

LET ALL TRUST IN THE LORD—WITH HIM IS PLENTEOUS REDEMPTION.

The main design of the Psalm and the improvement made of it by the Psalmist himself having been considered, it only remains to notice his appeal to others to drink at this fountain and enjoy the same benefits.

"*Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.*" verses 7, 8.

"*Let Israel hope in the Lord;*" (in the Hebrew, Hope, Israel, in Jehovah.) Trust, or expect; the same word with that, verse 5, "In his word do I hope;" properly, to expect, to look for, which includes hope, and adds some further degree of the soul's acting towards God: it is an earnest looking after the thing hoped for: hope in him, and look up to him, "*for*," or because, seeing that "*with the Lord there is mercy*," grace, bounty, goodness, good-will. This word is often joined with another, and that is, truth; (in the Hebrew, goodness, or mercy and truth.) These are, as it were, constituent parts of God's promises. It is goodness, grace, bounty, to promise any mercy; and it is of truth or faithfulness to make good what is so promised. The Septuagint commonly renders this word by *eleos*, that is, pardoning mercy, as it is every where used in the New Testament.

"*And with him is plenteous redemption;*" as before, "*with thee*," speaking unto God, verse 4; the meaning

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of which expression has been opened at large. *Redemption*, from the Hebrew to redeem: this word is often used for a proper redemption, such as is made by the intervention of a price, and not a mere deliverance to liberty by power, which is sometimes also called redemption. Thus it is said of the money that the first-born of the children of Israel which were above the number of the Levites, were redeemed with; that Moses took, in the Hebrew, the redemption, that is, the redemption-money, the price of their redemption. Numb. 3:49, and Psalm 49:8. The redemption of men's souls is precious; it cost a great price. The redemption, then, that is with God, relates to a price; goodness or mercy with respect to a price, becomes redemption, that is, actively the cause or means of it. What that price is, see in Matt. 20:28; 1 Pet. 1:18.

"*Plenteous* redemption; in the Hebrew, much, abundant, plenteous. It is used both for quantity and quality; much in quantity, or abundant; and in quality precious, excellent. It is applied both in a good and a bad sense: so it is said of our sins, Ezra, 9:6; (Hebrew, our sins are increased or multiplied, or are great;) many in number, and heinous in their nature or quality. And in the other sense it is applied to the mercy of God, whereby they are removed; it is great or plenteous, it is excellent or precious.

"*And He*," that is, the Lord Jehovah; he with whom is plenteous redemption, shall redeem, (in the Hebrew,) or make them partakers of that redemption that is with him. He shall redeem Israel, that is, those who hope and trust in him.

"*From all his iniquities*," (in the Hebrew, his iniqui-

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ties,) that is, of the elect Israel, and every individual amongst them. But the word signifies trouble as well as sin, especially the trouble or punishment that is for sin. So Cain expresses himself upon the annunciation of his sentence: (in the Hebrew, my sin, that is, the punishment thou hast denounced against my sin, is too great or heavy for me to bear,) Gen. 4 : 13. There is a near affinity between sin and trouble; punishment is inseparable from iniquity. Then the word here used signifies, either sin with reference to trouble due to it, or trouble with respect to sin whence it proceeds. And both may well be here intended. God shall redeem Israel from all his sins, and troubles that have ensued thereon.

These words close up the psalm. He who began with depths, his own depths, of sin and trouble, out of which and about which he cried unto God, is so encouraged by the prospect of grace and forgiveness with God, which by faith he had obtained, as to preach to others, and to support them also in expectation of deliverance from all their sin and trouble.

And such for the most part are all exercises and trials of the children of God. Their entrance may be a storm, but their close is a calm. Their beginning is ofttimes trouble, but their latter end is peace; peace to themselves, and advantage to the church of God. For men in all ages coming out of great trials of their own, have been the most instrumental for the good of others. For God does not greatly try any of his children, but with some especial end for his own glory.

The sense and intent of the Psalmist in these words resolves itself into three general parts:

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An exhortation or admonition: "Israel, hope in the Lord," or expect Jehovah.

A ground of encouragement to the performance of the duty exhorted to: "because with the Lord there is much, plenteous, abundant, precious redemption."

A gracious promise of a precious issue which shall be given to the performance of this duty: "He shall redeem Israel from all his sins, and out of all his troubles."

1. In the exhortation we notice,

The persons exhorted; that is, Israel; not Israel according to the flesh. For "they are not all Israel who are of Israel." Rom. 9 : 6. It is the Israel mentioned, Psalm 73 : 1, the whole Israel of God, to whom he is good, such as are of a clean heart; that is, all those who are interested in the covenant, and do inherit the promise of their forefathers, who were first called by that name; all believers: the Psalmist treats them all in general in this matter.

There are none of them but have their trials and entanglements about sin, more or less. As there is none that liveth and sinneth not, so there is none that sinneth and is not perplexed and troubled. Perhaps they are not all in the same condition with him, in the depths that he has plunged into. Yet, more or less, all and every one of them is so far concerned in sin as to need his direction. All the saints of God either have been, or are, or may be in these depths. It is a good saying of Austin on this place: None so in the deep as they who do not cry and call out of the deep. They are in a deep of security, who are never sensible of a deep of sin.

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There are none of them, whatever their present condition be, but may fall into like depths with those of the Psalmist. There is nothing absolutely in the covenant, nor in any promise, to secure them from it. What befalls any one believer, may befall them all. They may fall into depths of sin; that some of them have done so, we have testimonies and instances beyond expectation. It is good, then, that all of them should be prepared for the duty which all may stand in need of, and for a right discharge of it. Besides, the duty mentioned is not confined to the condition before described, but is proper in all circumstances; therefore are all the Israel of God exhorted to it.

The duty is hoping in Jehovah, with such a hope or trust as has an expectation of relief joined with it. This duty implies the renunciation of hope of deliverance either from sin or trouble *in any other way:* Hope in Jehovah. This is frequently expressed, where the performance of this duty is mentioned; see Hos. 14 : 3; Jer. 3 : 22, 23. And we have declared the nature of it, in the exposition of the first and second verses. It also implies *expectation from him;* and this also hath been insisted on in the observations from the verses immediately preceding, wherein also the whole nature of this duty was explained, and directions were given for the performance of it.

2. *The encouragement* to this duty, for "with the Lord is plenteous redemption."

Observe *what it is* that he professes as the great encouragement to the duty mentioned, namely, redemption, the redemption that is with God; the same with the forgiveness before mentioned; mercy, pardon, be-

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nignity, bounty. He does not bid them hope in the Lord because they were the seed of Abraham, the peculiar people of God, made partakers of privileges above all the people in the world; much less because of their worthiness in themselves; but merely on account of mercy in God. The mercy of God, and the redemption that is with him, is the only ground to sinners for hope and confidence.

Two points should be noticed in this grace, the one expressed, the other implied in the words. The first is, that it is *plenteous*, abundant. What principally discourages distressed souls from a comfortable waiting on God is, their fears lest they should not obtain mercy from him, and that because their sins are so great and so many, or attended with such aggravations, that it is impossible they should find acceptance with God. This ground of despondency and unbelief the Psalmist obviates, by representing the fulness, the plenty, the boundless plenty of the mercy in God. It is such as will suit the condition of the greatest sinners in their greatest depths; the stores of its treasures are inexhaustible. And the force of the exhortation lies not so much in this, that there is redemption with God, as that this redemption is plenteous or abundant.

Here is also an intimation in the word itself, of the relation which the goodness and grace of God have to *the blood of Christ;* whence it is called redemption. This, as was shown, has respect to a price; the price whereby we are bought, that is, the blood of Christ. This is that whereby a way is made for the exercise of mercy towards sinners; redemption, which properly denotes actual deliverance, is said to be with God, or

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in him, as the effect in the cause. The causes of it are his own grace, and the blood of Christ, prepared for the redeeming of believers from sin and trouble unto his own glory. And herein lies the encouragement that the Psalmist proposes to the performance of the duty exhorted to, namely, to wait on God. It is taken from God himself, as all encouragements to sinners to draw nigh unto him, and to wait for him, must be. Nothing but himself can give us confidence to go to him. And it is suited to the state of the soul under consideration. Redemption and mercy are suited to give relief from sin and misery.

3. We have a promise of the gracious result of the performance of this duty. "He shall redeem his people from all their iniquities." Two things are observable in the words.

The certainty of the issue or event of the duty mentioned; in the Hebrew, he shall, or will redeem; he will assuredly do so. Now, though this in the Psalmist is given out by revelation, and is a new promise of God, yet, as it relates to the condition of the soul here expressed, and the discovery made by faith of forgiveness and redemption with God, the certainty intended in this assertion is built upon the principles before laid down.

This conclusion is drawn from *the nature of God.* There is forgiveness and redemption with him, and he will act towards his people suitably to his own nature. There is redemption with him, and therefore he will redeem; forgiveness with him, and therefore he will forgive. As the conclusion is certain and infallible, that wicked men, ungodly men, shall be destroyed, because God is righteous and holy, his righteousness and holi-

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ness indispensably requiring their destruction; so are the redemption and salvation of all that believe certain, because there is forgiveness with him; he is good and gracious, and ready to forgive; his goodness and grace require their salvation. And the conclusion is certain, on account of God's *faithfulness in his promises.* He hath promised, that those who wait on him shall not be ashamed; that their expectation shall not be disappointed; whence the conclusion is certain, that in his time and way they shall be redeemed

Observe also *the extent* of this deliverance or redemption: "Shall redeem Israel from all their iniquities." It was showed in the opening of the verse, that this word denotes either sin-procuring trouble, or trouble procured by sin; and there is a respect both to sin and its punishment: from both, from all of both kinds, God will redeem his Israel. Not this or that evil, this or that sin, but from all evil, all sin: he will take all sin from their souls, and wipe all tears from their eyes. God is said to do this on many accounts. He does it on account of the great *cause* of all actual deliverance and redemption, the blood of Christ. He hath laid an assured foundation of the whole work; the price of redemption is paid, and they shall in due time enjoy the effects and fruits of it. And this is the actual *communication* of the effects of that redemption to them. This is sure to all the elect of God, to his whole Israel. They shall all be made partakers of it. This is the end of all the promises of God, and of the grace and mercy promised in them; namely, that they should be means to exhibit to believers that redemption which is purchased and prepared for them. This is done partially,

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initially and gradually, in this life. Here God gives them the pardon of their sins, being justified freely by his grace; and in his sanctification of them through his Spirit, gives them deliverance from the power and dominion of sin. Many troubles he also delivers them from, and from all as far as they are penal. And it will be done completely when he shall have freed them from sin and trouble, and from all the effects and consequences of sin, by bringing them to the enjoyment of himself in glory.

The words being thus explained, we may briefly consider what they express concerning *the state or actings of the soul* represented in this psalm.

Having himself attained to the state before described, and being engaged resolvedly in the performance of the duty which would assuredly bring him into the haven of rest and peace, the Psalmist applies himself to the residue of the Israel of God, to give them encouragement to this duty with himself, from the experience he had of a blessed success therein. As if he had said to them, "Ye are now in afflictions, and under troubles, and that on account of your sins and provocations: a condition, I confess, sad and deplorable; but yet there is hope for Israel concerning these things. For consider how it hath been with me, and how the Lord hath dealt with me. I was in depths inexpressible, and saw for a while no way or means of delivery: but God hath been pleased graciously to reveal himself to me, as a God pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin; and in the consolation and support which I have received thereby, I am waiting for a full participation of the

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fruits of his love. Let me therefore prevail with you, who are in a like condition, to adopt the same course with me. Only let your expectation be fixed with mercy and sovereign grace, without regard to any privilege or worth in yourselves. Rest in the plenteous redemption, those stores of grace which are with Jehovah, and, according to his faithfulness in his promises, he will deliver you out of all perplexing troubles.

It only remains to close this treatise by briefly naming a few *doctrinal truths* which grow out of the subject.

1. The Lord JEHOVAH is the only hope for sin-distressed souls: "Hope in the Lord." This hath been sufficiently discovered and confirmed on sundry passages in the psalm.

2. The ground of all hope and expectation of relief in sinners is mere grace, mercy and redemption. "Hope in the Lord, for with him there is redemption." All other grounds of hope are false and deceiving.

3. Inexhaustible stores of mercy and redemption are needful for the encouragement of sinners to rest and wait on God: "With him is plentiful redemption." Such is your misery, so pressing are your fears and distresses, that nothing less than boundless grace can relieve or support you; there are therefore such treasures and stores in God as are suited to your necessities: "With him is plenteous redemption."

4. The ground of all the dispensation of mercy, goodness, grace and forgiveness to sinners, is laid in the blood of Christ. Hence it is here called redemption.

5. All that wait on God on account of mercy and grace, shall have an undoubted issue of peace: "He

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shall redeem Israel." Let him, saith God, lay hold of my arm that he may have peace, and he shall have peace. Isaiah, 27 : 5.

6. Mercy given to them that wait on God shall, in the close and issue, be every way full and satisfying: "He shall redeem his people from all their iniquities."

These propositions arise from the words as absolutely considered in themselves. If we mark their relation to the peculiar condition of the soul represented in this psalm, they will yet afford us the ensuing observations:

Observation 1. They who out of depths have by faith and waiting on God obtained mercy, or are supported in waiting for a sense of mercy and forgiveness, are fitted, and only they are fitted, to preach and declare grace and mercy to others. This was the case with the Psalmist. Upon emerging out of his own depths and straits, he declares the mercy and redemption, whereby he was delivered, unto the whole Israel of God.

Observation 2. A saving participation of grace and forgiveness leaves a deep impression of its fulness and excellency on the soul of a sinner; so was it here with the Psalmist. Having himself obtained forgiveness, he knows no bounds or measure, as it were, in extolling it. There is with God mercy, redemption, plenteous redemption, redeeming from all iniquity; I have found it so, and so will every one who shall believe it

THE END.

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