

The Christian in Complete Armour;

A Treatise

Of the Saints' War against the Devil:

Wherein a Discovery is made of that grand Enemy of God and his People, in his Policies, Power, Seat of his Empire, Wickedness, and chief design he hath against the Saints.

A MAGAZINE OPENED,

From whence the Christian is furnished with Spiritual Arms for the Battle, helped on with his Armour, and taught the use of his Weapon: together with the happy issue of the whole War.

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A TREATISE OF THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

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

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

— Ephesians 6:10-20.

THE INTRODUCTION

Paul was now in bonds, yet not so close kept as to be denied pen and paper; God, it seems, gave him some favour in the sight of his enemies: Paul was Nero's prisoner, but Nero was much more God's. And while God had work for Paul, he found him friends both in court and prison. Let persecutors send saints to prison, God can provide a keeper for their turn.

But how does this great apostle spend his time in prison? Not in publishing invectives against those, though the worst of men, who had laid him in; a piece of zeal which the holy sufferers of those times were little acquainted with: nor in politic counsels, how he might wind himself out of his trouble, by sordid flattery of, or sinful compliance with, the great ones of the times. Some would have used any picklock to have opened a passage to their liberty and not scrupled, so escape they might, whether they got out at the door or window. But this holy man was not so fond of liberty or life, as to purchase them at the least hazard to the gospel. He knew too much of another world, to bid so high for the enjoying of this; and therefore he is regardless what his enemies can do with him, well knowing he should go to heaven whether they would or no. No, the great care which lay upon him, was for the churches of Christ; as a faithful steward he labors to set the house of God in order before his departure. We read of no despatches sent to court to procure his liberty; but many to the churches, to help them to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free. There is

no such way to be even with the devil and his instruments, for all their spite against us, as by doing what good we can wherever we be come.

The devil had as good have let Paul alone, for he no sooner comes into prison but he falls a preaching, at which the gates of Satan's prison fly open, and poor sinners come forth. Happy for Onesimus that Paul was sent to jail; God had an errand for Paul to do to him and others, which the devil never dreamed of. Nay he doth not only preach in prison, but that he may do the devil all the mischief he can, he sends his epistles to the churches, that tasting his spirit in his afflictions, and reading his faith, now ready to be offered up, they might much more be confirmed; amongst which Ephesus was not least in his thoughts, as you may perceive by his abode with them two years together, Acts 19:10; as also by his sending for the elders of this church as far as Miletus, in his last journey to Jerusalem, Acts 20:17, to take his farewell of them as never to see their faces in this world more. And surely the sad impression which that heart-breaking departure left on the spirits of these elders, yea, the whole church, by them acquainted with this mournful news, might stir up Paul, now in prison, to write unto this church, that having so much of his spirit, yea, of the spirit of the gospel, left in their hands to converse with, they might more patiently take the news of his death.

In the former part of this epistle, he soars high in the mysteries of faith. In the latter, according to his usual method, he descends to application; where we find him contracting all those truths, as beams together, in a powerful exhortation, the more to enkindle their hearts, and powerfully persuade them to 'walk worthy of their vocation,' Eph. 4:1, which then is done, when the Christian's life is so transparent that the grace of the gospel shines forth in the power of holiness on every side, and from all his relations, as a candle in a crystal glass, not in a dark lantern, lightsome one way and dark another: and therefore he runs over the several relations of husband, wife, parents, children, masters, and servants, and presseth the same in all these.

Now having set every one in his proper place, about his particular duty; as a wise general after he has ranged his army, and drawn them forth into rank and file, he makes the following speech at the head of the Ephesian camp, all in martial phrase, as best suiting the Christian's calling, which is a continued warfare with the world, and the prince of the world. The speech itself contains TWO PARTS.

FIRST, A short but sweet and powerful encouragement, Eph. 6:10. SECONDLY, The other part is spent in several directions for their managing this war the more successfully, with some motives here and there sprinkled among them, Eph. 6:11-20. We begin with the first.

PART FIRST

A Sweet and Powerful Encouragement to the War

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

The apostle begins his speech with THE WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO BATTLE: 'Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord;' the best way indeed to prepare them for the following directions. A soul deeply possessed with fear, and dispirited with strong apprehensions of danger, is in no posture for counsel. As we

see in any army when put to flight by some sudden alarm, or apprehension of danger, it is hard rallying them into order until the fright occasioned thereby is over; therefore the apostle first raiseth up their spirits, 'be strong in the Lord.' As if he should say, Perhaps some drooping souls find their hearts fail them, while they see their enemies so strong, and they so weak; so numerous, and they so few; so well appointed, and they so naked and unarmed; so skilful and expert at arms, but they green and raw soldiers. Let not these or any other thoughts dismay you; but with undaunted courage march on, and be strong in the Lord, on whose performance lies the stress of battle, and not on your skill or strength. It is not the least of a minister's care and skill in dividing the word, so to press the Christian's duty, as not to oppress his spirit with the weight of it, by laying it on the creature's own shoulders, and not on the Lord's strength, as here our apostle teacheth us. In this verse (under four heads or branches), We have **FIRST**, A familiar appellation, 'my brethren.' **SECOND**, An exhortation, 'be strong.' **THIRD**, A cautionary direction annexed to the exhortation, 'in the Lord.' **FOURTH**, An encouraging amplification of the direction, 'and in the power of his might,' or in his mighty power.

BRANCHES FIRST AND SECOND.

The appellation, 'my brethren.'—
The exhortation, 'be strong.'

We have, **BRANCH FIRST**, a familiar appellation, 'my brethren.' This we shall waive, and begin with, **BRANCH SECOND**, the exhortation—'be strong;' that is, be of good courage, so commonly used in scripture phrase: 'Be strong and courageous,' II Chr. 32:7; 'Say to them that are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong,' Isa. 35:4. Or, unite all the powers of your souls, and muster up your whole force, for you will have use for all you can make or get. From whence the point is this.

[Christian courage and resolution
—wherefore necessary.]

DOCTRINE, The Christian of all men needs courage and resolution. Indeed there is nothing that he does as a Christian, or can do, but is an act of valour. A cowardly spirit is beneath the lowest duty of a Christian, 'be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest'—What? stand in battle against those warlike nations? No, but that thou mayest 'observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee,' Joshua 1:7. It requires more prowess and greatness of spirit to obey God faithfully, than to command an army of men; to be a Christian than a captain. What seems less, than for a Christian to pray? yet this cannot be performed

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

First.—The Christian is to proclaim and prosecute an irreconcilable war against his bosom sins; those sins which have lain nearest his heart, must now be trampled under his feet. So David, 'I have kept myself from my iniquity.' Now what courage and resolution does this require? You think Abraham was tried to purpose, when called to take his 'son, his son Isaac, his only son whom he loved,' Gen. 22:2, and offer him up with his own hands, and no other; yet what was that to this? Soul, take thy lust, thy only lust, which is the child of thy dearest love, thy Isaac, the sin which has caused the most joy and laughter, from which thou hast promised thyself the greatest return of pleasure or profit; as ever thou lookest to see my face with comfort, lay hands on it and offer it up: pour out the blood of it before me; run the sacrificing knife of mortification into the very heart of it; and this freely, joyfully, for it is no pleasing sacrifice that is offered with a countenance cast down—and all this now, before thou hast one embrace more from it. Truly this is a hard chapter, flesh and blood cannot bear this saying; our lust will not lie so patiently on the altar, as Isaac, or as a 'Lamb that is brought to the slaughter which was dumb,' but will roar and shriek; yea, even shake and rend the heart with its hideous outcries.

Who is able to express the conflicts, the writtings, the convulsions of spirit the Christian feels, before he can bring his heart to this work? Or who can fully set forth the art, the rhetorical insinuations, with which such a lust will plead for itself? One while Satan will extenuate and mince the matter: It is but a little one, O spare it, and thy soul shall live for all that. Another while he flatters the soul with the secrecy of it: Thou mayest keep me and thy credit also; I will not be seen abroad in thy company to shame thee among thy neighbours; shut me up in the most retired room thou hast in thy heart, from the hearing of others, if thou wilt only let me now and then have the wanton embraces of thy thoughts and affections in secret. If that cannot be granted, then Satan will seem only to desire execution may be stayed awhile, as Jephthah's daughter of her father: 'let me alone a month or two, and then do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth,' Judges 11:36, 37, well knowing few such reprieved lusts but at last obtain their full pardon; yea,

recover their favour with the soul. Now what resolution doth it require to break through such violence and importunity, and notwithstanding all this to do present execution? Here the valiant swordsmen of the world have showed themselves mere cowards, who have come out of the field with victorious banners, and then lived, yea, died slaves to a base lust at home. As one could say of a great Roman captain who, as he rode in his triumphant chariot through Rome, had his eye never off a courtesan that walked along the street: Behold, how this goodly captain, that had conquered such potent armies, is himself conquered by one silly woman.

Second.—The Christian is to walk singularly, not after the world's guise, Rom. 12:2. We are commanded not to be conformed to this world, that is, not to accommodate ourselves to the corrupt customs of the world. The Christian must not be of such a complying nature as to cut the coat of his profession according to the fashion of the times, or the humor of the company he falls into; like that courtier, who being asked how he could keep his preferment in such changing times, which one while had a prince for Popery, another while against Popery, answered, he was *e salice, non ex quercu ortus*—he was not a stubborn oak, but bending osier, that could yield to the wind. No, the Christian must stand fixed to his principles, and not change his habit; but freely show what countryman he is by his holy constancy in the truth. Now what an odium, what snares, what dangers doth this singularity expose the Christian to? Some will hoot and mock him, as one in a Spanish fashion would be laughed at in your streets. Thus Michal flouted David. Indeed, the world counts the Christian for his singularity of life the only fool; which I have thought gave the first occasion to that nick-name, whereby men commonly express a silly man or a fool. Such a one, say they, is a mere Abraham; that is, in the world's account, a fool. But why an Abraham? Because Abraham did that which carnal reason, the world's idol, laugh's at as mere folly; he left a present estate in his father's house to go he knew not whither, to receive an inheritance he knew not when. And truly such fools all the saints are branded for by the wise world. 'You know the man and his communication,' said Jehu to his companions, asking what that mad fellow came for, who was

no other than a prophet, II Kings 9:11. Now it requires courage to despise the shame which the Christian must expect to meet withal for his singularity. Shame is that which proud nature most disdains, to avoid which many durst not 'confess Christ openly,' John 7:13. Many lose heaven because they are ashamed to go in a fool's coat thither. Again, as some will mock, so others will persecute to death, merely for this nonconformity in the Christian's principles and practices to them. This was the trap laid for the three children; they must dance before Nebuchadnezzar's pipe, or burn. This was the plot laid to ensnare Daniel, who walked so unblameably, that his very enemies gave him this testimony, that he had no fault but his singularity in his religion, Dan. 6:5. It is a great honour to a Christian, yea, to religion itself, when all their enemies can say is, They are precise, and will not do as we do. Now in such a case as this, when the Christian must turn or burn, leave praying or become a prey to the cruel teeth of bloody men; how many politic retreats and self-preserving distinctions would a cowardly unresolved heart invent? The Christian that hath so great opposition had need be well locked into the saddle of his profession, or else he will soon be dismounted.

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

to Egypt, and yet with an undaunted spirit maintained his integrity, yea, resolved though not a man beside would bear him company, yet he would serve the Lord.

Fourth.—The Christian must trust in a withdrawing God, Isa. 50:10. Let him that walks in darkness, and sees no light, trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. This requires a holy boldness of faith indeed, to venture into God's presence, as Esther into Ahasuerus', when no smile is to be seen on his face, no golden sceptre of the promise perceived by the soul, as held forth to embolden it to come near, then to press in with this noble resolution, 'If I perish, I perish,' Est. 4:16. Nay, more, to trust not only in a withdrawing but a 'killing God,' Job 13:15; not when his love is hid, but when his wrath breaks forth. Now for a soul to make its approaches to God by a recumbency of faith, while God seems to fire upon it, and shoot his frowns like envenomed arrows into it, is hard work, and will try the Christian's mettle to purpose. Yet such a masculine spirit we find in the poor woman of Canaan, who takes up the bullets of Christ shot at her, and with a humble boldness of faith sends them back again in her prayer.

Fifth.—The believer is to persevere in his Christian course to the end of his life: his work and his life must go off the stage together. This adds weight to every other difficulty of the Christian's calling. We have known many who have gone into the field, and liked the work of a soldier for a battle or two, but soon have had enough, and come running home again, but few can bear it as a constant trade. Many are soon engaged in holy duties, easily persuaded to take up a profession of religion, and as easily persuaded to lay it down, like the new moon, which shines a little in the first part of the night, but is down before half the night is gone—lightsome professors in their youth, whose old age is wrapped up in thick darkness of sin and wickedness. O, this persevering is a hard word! this taking up the cross daily, this praying always, this watching night and day, and never laying aside our clothes and armour, I mean indulging ourselves, to remit and unbend in our holy waiting on God, and walking with God. This sends many sorrowful away from Christ, yet this is a saint's duty, to make religion his every-day work, without any vacation from one end of the year to the

other. These few instances are enough to show what need the Christian hath of resolution. The application follows.

[Use or Application]

Use First.—This gives us reason why there are so many professors and so few Christians indeed; so many that run and so few obtain; so many go into the field against Satan, and so few come out conquerors; because all have a desire to be happy, but few have courage and resolution to grapple with the difficulties that meet them in the way to their happiness. All Israel came joyfully out of Egypt under Moses' conduct, yea, and a mixed multitude with them, but when their bellies were pinched with a little hunger, and the greedy desires of a present Canaan deferred, yea, instead of peace and plenty, war and penury, they, like white-livered soldiers, are ready to fly from their colours, and make a dishonorable retreat into Egypt. Thus the greatest part of those who profess the gospel, when they come to push of pike, to be tried what they will do, deny to endure for Christ, grow sick of their enterprise. Alas! their hearts fail them, they are like the waters of Bethlehem. But if they must dispute their passage with so many enemies, they will even content themselves with their own cistern, and leave heaven to others who will venture more for it. O how many part with Christ at this cross-way! Like Orpah, they go a furlong or two with Christ, while he goes to take them off from their worldly hopes, and bids them prepare for hardship, and then they fairly kiss and leave him, loath indeed to lose heaven, but more loath to buy it at so dear a rate. Like some green heads, that childishly make choice at some sweet trade, such as is the confectioner's, from a liquorish tooth they have to the junkets¹ it affords, but meeting with sour sauce of labour and toil that goes with them, they give in, and are weary of their service. So the sweet bait of religion hath drawn many to nibble at it, who are offended with the hard service it calls to. It requires another spirit than the world can give or receive to follow Christ fully.

Use Second.—Let this then exhort you, Chris-

tians, to labour for this holy resolution and prowess, which is so needful for your Christian profession, that without it you cannot be what you profess. The fearful are in the forlorn of those that march for hell, Rev. 21; the violent and valiant are they which take heaven by force: cowards never won heaven. Say not that thou hast royal blood running in thy veins, and art begotten of God, except thou canst prove thy pedigree by this heroic spirit, to dare to be holy despite men and devils. The eagle tries her young ones by the sun; Christ tries his children by their courage, that dare to look on the face of death and danger for his sake, Mark 8:34, 35. O how uncomely a sight is it to see, a bold sinner and a fearful saint, one resolved to be wicked, and a Christian wavering in his holy course; to see guilt put innocence to flight, and hell keep the field, impudently braving it with displayed banners of open profaneness; [to see] saints hide their colours for shame, or run from them for fear, who should rather wrap themselves in them, and die upon the place, than thus betray the glorious name of God, which is called upon by them to the scorn of the uncircumcised. Take heart therefore, O ye saints, and be strong; your cause is good, God himself espouseth your quarrel, who hath appointed you his own Son, General of the field, called 'the Captain of our salvation,' Heb. 2:10. He shall lead you on with courage, and bring you off with honour. He lived and died for you; he will live and die with you; for mercy and tenderness to his soldiers, none like him. Trajan, it is said, rent his clothes to bind up his soldiers' wounds: Christ poured out his blood as balm to heal his saints' wounds; tears off his flesh to bind them up. For prowess, none to compare with him: he never turned his head from danger: no, not when hell's malice and heaven's justice appeared in field against him; knowing all that should come upon him, [he] went forth and said, 'Whom seek ye?' John 18:4. For success insuperable: he never lost battle even when he lost his life: he won the field, carrying the spoils thereof in the triumphant chariot of his ascension, to heaven with him: where he makes an open show of them to the unspeakable joy of saints and angels. You march in the midst of gallant spirits, your fellow-soldiers every one the son of a Prince. Behold, some, enduring with you here below a great flight of afflictions and temptation, take heaven by storm and

1. Junkets, an old word, which generally, as here, means sweetmeats.—ED.

force. Others you may see after many assaults, repulses, and rallyings of their faith and patience, got upon the walls of heaven, conquerors, from whence they do, as it were, look down, and call you, their fellow-brethren on earth, to march up the hill after them, crying aloud: 'Fall on, and the city is your own, as now it is ours, who for a few days' conflict are now crowned with heaven's glory, one moment's enjoyment of which hath dried up all our tears, healed all our wounds, and made us forget the sharpness of the fight, with the joy of our present victory.' In a word, Christians, God and angels are spectators, observing how you quit yourselves like children of the Most High; every exploit your faith doth against sin and Satan causeth a shout in heaven; while you valiantly prostrate this temptation, scale that difficulty, regain the other ground, you even now lost out of your enemies' hands. Your dear Saviour, who stands by with a reserve for your relief at a pinch, his very heart leaps within him for joy to see the proof of your love to him and zeal for him in all your combats; and will not forget all the faithful service you have done in his wars on earth; but when thou comest out of the field, will receive thee with the like joy as he was entertained himself at his return to heaven of his Father.

[Christian courage and resolution
—how obtained.]

Now, Christian, if thou meanest thus courageously to bear up against all opposition, in the march to heaven, as thou shouldst do well to raise thy spirit with such generous and soul-ennobling thoughts, so in an especial manner look thy principles be well fixed, or else thy heart will be unstable, and an unstable heart is weak as water, it cannot excel in courage. Two things are required to fix our principles.

First. An established judgement in this truth of God. He that knows not well what or whom he fights for [may] soon be persuaded to change his side, or at least stand neuter. Such may be found that go for professors, that can hardly give an account what they hope for, or whom they hope in; yet Christians they must be thought, though they run before they know their errand; or if or if they have some principles they go upon, they are so unsettled that every wind blows

them down, like loose tiles from the house top. Blind zeal is soon put to a shameful retreat, while holy resolution, built on fast principles, lifts up its head like a rock in the midst of waves. 'The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits,' Dan. 11:32. The angel told Daniel who were the men that would stand to their tackling, and bear up for God in that hour, both of temptation and persecution, which should be brought upon them by Antiochus; [that] not all the Jews, but some of them, should be corrupted basely by flatteries, others scared by threats out of their profession; only a few of fixed principles, who knew their God whom they served, and were grounded in their religion, these should be strong, and do exploits: that is, to flatteries they should be incorruptible, and to power and force unconquerable.

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

of some town, are spoiled for fighting ever after.

BRANCH THIRD

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

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

[The saint's strength lies in the Lord.]

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

a well, which will not ascend with all our pumping till God pour in his exciting grace, and then it comes. To will is more than to think, to exert our will into action more than both. These are of God: 'For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure,' Php. 2:13. He makes the heart new, and having made it fit for heavenly motion, setting every wheel, as it were, in its right place, then he winds it up by his actuating grace, and sets it on going, the thoughts to stir, the will to move and make towards the holy object presented; yet here the chariot is set, and cannot ascend the hill of action till God puts his shoulder to the wheel: 'to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not,' Rom. 7:18. God is at the bottom of the ladder, and at the top also, the Author and Finisher, yea, helping and lifting the soul at every round, in his ascent to any holy action. Well, now the Christian is set on work, how long will he keep close to it? Alas, poor soul, no longer than he is held up by the same hand that empowered him at first. He hath soon wrought out the strength received, and therefore to maintain the tenure of a holy course, there must be renewing strength from heaven every moment, which David knew, and therefore when his heart was in as holy a frame as ever he felt it, and his people by their free-will offering declared the same, yet even then he prays, that God would 'keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of his people, and prepare their heart unto him,' I Chron. 29:18. He adored the mercy that made them willing, and then he implores his further grace to strengthen them, and tie a knot, that these precious pearls newly strung on hearts might not slip off. The Christian, when fullest of divine communications, is but a glass without a foot, he cannot stand, or hold what he hath received, any longer than God holds him in his strong hand. Therefore, Christ, when bound for heaven, and ready to take his leave of his children, bespeaks his Father's care of them in his absence. 'Father, keep them,' John 17:11; as if he had said, they must not be left alone, they are poor shiftless children, that can neither stand nor go without help; they will lose the grace I have given them, and fall into those temptations which I kept them from while I was with them, if they be out of thy eye or arms but one moment; and therefore, 'Father, keep them.'

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

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

[2. Hearing the Word.] Well, cast your eyes once more upon the Christian, as engaging in another ordinance of hearing the word preached. The soul's strength to hear the Word is from God. He opens the heart to attend, Acts 16:14, yea, he opens the understanding of the saint to receive the Word, so as to conceive what it means. It is like Samson's riddle, which we cannot unfold without his heifer. He opens the womb of the soul to conceive by it, as the understanding to conceive of it, that the barren soul be-

comes a 'joyful mother of children.' David sat for half a year under the public lectures of the law, and the womb of his heart shut up, till Nathan comes, and God with him, and now is the time of life. He conceives presently, yea, and brings forth the same day, falls presently into the bitter pangs of sorrow for his sins, which went not over till he had cast them forth in that sweet 51st Psalm. Why should this one word work more than all the former, but that now God struck in with his word, which he did not before? He is therefore said to 'teach his people to profit,' Isa. 48:17. He sits in heaven that teacheth hearts. When God's Spirit, who is the headmaster, shall call a soul from his usher to himself, and say, —Soul, you have not gone the way to receive by hearing the word. Thus and thus conceive of such a truth, improve such a promise —presently the eyes of his understanding open, and his heart burns within him while he speaks to him. Thus you see the truth of this point, 'That the Christian's strength is in the Lord.' Now we shall give some demonstrations [or reasons].

[Why the saint's strength is laid up in God.]

Reason First. The first reason may be taken from the nature of the saints and their grace. Both are creatures, they and their grace also. Now², 'it is in the very nature of the creature to depend on God its Maker,' both for being and operation. Can you conceive and accident to be out of its subject, whiteness out of the wall, or some other subject? It is impossible that the creature should be, or act without strength from God. This to be, act in and of himself, is so incommunicable a property of the Deity, that he cannot impart it to his creature. God is, and there is none besides him. When God made the world, it is said indeed he ended his work, that is, of creation: he made no new species and kinds of creatures more; but to this day he hath not ended his work of providence: 'My Father worketh hitherto,' saith Christ, John 5:17, that is, in preserving and empowering what he hath made with strength to be and act, that therefore he is said to hold our souls in life. Works of art, which man makes, when finished, may stand some

2. Inesse est de esse creaturæ.

time without the workman's help, as the house, when the carpenter that made it is dead; but God's works, both of nature and grace, are never off his hand, and therefore as the Father is said to work hitherto for the preservation of the works of nature, so the Son, to whom is committed the work of redemption, he tells us, worketh also. Neither ended he his work when he rose again, any otherwise than his Father did in the work of creation. God made an end of making, so Christ made an end of purchasing mercy, grace, and glory for believers, by once dying; and as God rested at the end of creation, so he, when he had wrought eternal redemption, and 'by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high,' Heb. 1:3. But he ceaseth not to work by his intercession with God for us, and by his Spirit in us for God, whereby he upholds his saints, their graces, and comforts his life, without which they would run to ruin. Thus we see as grace is a creature, the Christian depends on God for his strength. But further,

Reason Second. The Christian's grace is not only a creature, but a weak creature, conflicting with enemies stronger than itself, and therefore cannot keep the field without an auxiliary strength from heaven. The weakest goes to the wall, if no succour comes in. Grace in this life is but weak, like a king in the cradle, which gives advantage to Satan to carry on his plots more strongly to the disturbance of this young king's reign in the soul, yea, he would soon make an end of the war in the ruin of the believer's grace, did not Heaven take the Christian into protection. It is true indeed, grace, whereever it is, hath a principle in itself that makes it desire and endeavour to preserve itself according to its strength, but being overpowered must perish, except assisted by God, as fire in green wood, which deads and damps the part kindled, will in time go out, except blown up, or more fire put to that little; so will grace in the heart. God brings his grace into the heart by conquest. Now, as in a conquered city, though some yield and become true subjects to the conqueror, yet others plot how they may shake off this yoke; and therefore it requires the same power to keep, as was to win it at first. The Christian hath an unregenerate part, that is discounted at this new change in the heart, and disdains as much to come under the sweet government of Christ's sceptre, as the Sodomites that Lot should

judge them. What, this fellow, a stranger, control us! And Satan heads this mutinous rout against the Christian, so that if God should not continually reinforce this new planted colony in the heart, the very natives (I mean corruptions) that are left, would come out of their dens and holes where they lie lurking, and eat up the little grace the holiest on earth hath; it would be as bread to these devourers.

Reason Third. A third demonstration may be taken from the grand design which God propounds to himself in the saint's salvation; yea, in the transaction of it from first to last. And that is twofold. 1. God would bring his saints to heaven in such a way as might be most expressive of his dear love and mercy to them. 2. He would so express his mercy and love to them, as might rebound back to him in the highest advance of his own glory possible. Now how becoming this is to both, that saints should have all their ability for every step they take in the way to heaven, will soon appear.

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

(1.) It distills a sweetness into all the believer hath or doth, when he finds any comfort in his bosom, any enlargement of heart in duty, any support under temptations, to consider whence came all these, what friend sends them in. They came not from my own cistern, or any creature's. O it is my God that hath been here, and left his sweet perfume of comfort behind him in my bosom! my God that hath unaware to me filled my sails with the gales of his Spirit, and brought me off the flats of my own deadness, where I lay aground. O, it is his sweet Spirit that held my head, stayed my heart in such an affliction and temptation, or else I had gone away in a fainting fit of unbelief. How can this choose but to endear God to a gracious soul? His succors coming so immediately from heaven, which would be lost, if the Christian had any strength to help himself (though this stock of strength came at first from God). Which, think you, speaks more love and condescent: for a prince to give a pension to a favorite, on which he may live by his own care, or for this prince to take the chief care upon himself, and come from day to

day to this man's house, and look into his cupboard, and see what provision he hath, what expense he is at, and so constantly to provide for the man from time to time? Possibly some proud spirit that likes to be his own man, or loves his means better than his prince, would prefer the former, but one that is ambitious to have the heart and love of his prince would be ravished with the latter. Thus God doth with his saints. The great God comes and looks into their cupboard, and sees how they are laid in, and sends in accordingly as he finds them. 'Your heavenly Father knows you have need of these things,' and you shall have them. He knows you need strength to pray, [to] hear, [to] suffer for him, and, in ipsâ horâ dabitur, 'in the very hour it will be given.'

(2.) This way of God's dealing with his saints adds to the fulness and stability of their strength. Were the stock in our own hands, we should soon prove broken merchants. God knows we are but leaking vessels, when fullest we could not hold it long; and therefore to make all sure, he sets us under the streaming forth of his strength, and a leaking vessel under a cock gets what it loseth. Thus we have our leakage supplied continually. This is the provision God made for Israel in the wilderness: He clave the rock, and the rock followed them. They had not only a draught at present, but it ran in a stream after them, so that you hear no more of their complaints for water. This rock was Christ. Every believer hath Christ at his back, following him with strength as he goes, for every condition and trial. One flower with the root is worth many in a posie, which though sweet yet doth not grow, but wither as we wear them in our bosoms. God's strength as the root keeps our grace lively, without which, though as orient as Adam's was, it would die.

2. Design. The second design that God hath in his saints' happiness is, that he may so express his mercy and love to them as may rebound back to him in the highest advance of his own glory therein, Eph. 1:4, 12, which is fully attained in this way of empowering saints, by a strength not of their own, but of their God his sending, as they are put to expense. Had God given his saints a stock of grace to have set up with and left them to the improvement of it, he had been magnified indeed, because it was more than God did owe the creature; but he had not been omnified

as now, when not only the Christian's first strength to close with Christ is from God, but he is beholden still to God for the exercise of that strength, in every action of his Christian course. As a child that travels in his father's company, all is paid for, but his father carries the purse, not himself, so the Christian's shot is discharged in every condition; but he cannot say this I did, or that I suffered, but God wrought all in me and for me. The very comb of pride is cut here; no room [is left] for any self-exalting thoughts. The Christian cannot say, that I am a saint is mercy; but being a saint, that my faith is strong, this is the child of my own care and watchfulness. Alas, poor Christian! who kept thine eye waking, and stirred up thy care? Was not this the offspring of God as well as thy faith at first? No saint shall say of heaven when he comes there, 'This is heaven, which I have built by the power of my might.' No, 'Jerusalem above is a city whose builder and maker is God.' Every grace, yea, degree of grace, is a stone in that building, the topstone whereof is laid in glory, where saints shall more plainly see, how God was not only Founder to begin, but Benefactor also to finish the same. The glory of the work shall not be crumbled and piecemealed out, some to God and some to the creature, but all entirely paid in to God, and he acknowledged all in all.

[Use or Application]

Use First. Is it the Christian's strength in the Lord, not in himself? Surely then the Christless person must needs be a poor impotent creature, void of all strength and ability of doing anything of itself towards its own salvation. If the ship launched, rigged, and with her sails spread cannot stir, till the wind come fair and fill them, much less the timber that lies in the carpenter's yard hew and frame itself into a ship. If the living tree cannot grow except the root communicate its sap, much less can a dead rotten stake in the hedge, which hath no root, live of its own accord. In a word, if a Christian, that hath his spiritual life of grace, cannot exercise this life without strength from above, then surely one void of this new life, dead in sins and trespasses, can never be able to beget this in himself, or concur to the production of it. The state of unregeneracy is a state of impotency.

'When we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly,' Rom. 5:6. And as Christ found the lump of mankind covered with the ruins of their lapsed estate (no more able to raise themselves from under the weight of God's wrath which lay upon them, than one buried under the rubbish of a fallen house is to free himself of that weight without help), so the Spirit finds sinners in as helpless a condition, as unable to repent, or believe on Christ for salvation, as they were of themselves to purchase it. Confounded therefore for ever be the language of those sons of pride, who cry up the power of nature, as if man with his own brick and slime of natural abilities were able to rear up such a building, whose top may reach heaven itself. 'It is not of him that will eth, nor of him that runneth, but God that sheweth mercy,' Rom. 9:16. God himself hath scattered such Babel-builders in the imagination of their hearts, who raiseth this spiritual temple in the souls of men, 'not by might, nor by a power,' of their own, 'but by his Spirit,' that so 'grace, grace,' might be proclaimed before it forever. And therefore, if any yet in their natural estate would become wise to salvation, let them first become fools in their own eyes, and renounce their carnal wisdom, which perceives the things of God, and beg wisdom of God, who giveth and upbraideth not. If any man would have strength to believe, let them become weak, and die to their own, for, 'by strength shall no man prevail,' 1 Sam. 2:9.

Use Second. Doth the Christian's strength lie in God, not in himself? This may for ever keep the Christian humble, when most engaged in duty, most assisted in his Christian course. Remember, Christian, when thou hast thy best suit on, who made it, who paid for it. Thy grace, thy comfort is neither the work of thy own hands, nor the price of thy own desert; be not, for shame, proud of another's cost. That assistance will not long stay which becomes a nurse to thy pride; thou art not lord of that assistance thou hast. Thy Father is wise, who when he alloweth thee most for thy spiritual maintenance, even then keeps the law in his own hands, and can soon curb thee, if thou growest wanton with his grace. Walk humbly therefore before thy God, and husband well that strength thou hast, remembering that it is bor-

rowed strength. Who will waste what he begs?³ or who will give that beggar that spends idly his alms? when thou hast most, thou canst not be long from thy God's door. And how canst thou look him on the face for more, who hast embezzled what thou hast received?

BRANCH FOURTH.

An amplification of the direction,
'and in the power of his might.'

In this branch we have an encouraging amplification annexed to the exhortation, in these words 'and in the power of his might,' where a twofold inquiry is requisite for the explication of the phrase. FIRST, What these words import, 'the power of his might.' SECOND, What it is to 'be strong in the power of his might.'

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

SECOND. What it is to 'be strong in the power of his might.' To be strong in the power of the Lord's might, implies two acts of faith. First, a settled firm persuasion that the Lord is almighty on power. 'Be strong in the power of his might,' that is, be strongly rooted in your faith, concerning this one foundation truth, that God is almighty. Second, It implies a further act of faith, not only to believe that God is almighty, but also that this almighty power of God is engaged for its defence; so as to bear up in the midst of all trials and temptations undauntedly, leaning on the arm of God Almighty, as it were his own strength. For that is the apostle's drift, as to beat us off from leaning on our own strength, so to encourage the

3. Nemo prodiget quod mendicat—no one will squander what he begs.

Christian to make use of God's almighty power, as freely as if it were his own, whenever assaulted by Satan in any kind. As a man set upon by a thief stirs up all the force and strength he hath in his whole body to defend himself and offend his adversary; so the apostle bids the Christian 'be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might,' that is, Soul, away to thy God, whose mighty power is all intended and devoted by God himself for thy succor and defence. Go strengthen and entrench thyself in it by a steadfast faith, as that which shall be laid out to the utmost for thy good. From whence these two notes [or doctrines], I conceive, will draw out the fatness of the words. **DOCTRINE FIRST,** That it should be the Christian's great care and endeavour in all temptations and trials to strengthen his faith on the almighty power of God. **DOCTRINE SECOND,** The Christian's duty and care is not only to believe that God is almighty, but strongly by faith to rest on this almighty power of God, as engaged for his help and succour in all his trials and temptations.

[Of acting our faith on
THE ALMIGHTY POWER OF GOD.]

DOCTRINE FIRST. It should be the Christian's great care in all temptations and trials to strengthen his faith on the almighty power of God. When God holds forth himself as an object of the soul's trust and confidence in any great strait or undertaking, commonly this attribute of his almighty power is presented in the promise, as the surest holdfast for faith to lay hold on. As a father in rugged way gives his child his arm to lay hold by, so doth God usually reach forth his almighty power for his saints to exercise their faith on, [as He did for] Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose faith God tried above most of his saints before or since, for not one of those great things which were promised to them did they live to see performed in their days. And how doth God make known himself to them for their support, but by displaying this attribute? 'I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty,' Ex. 6:3. This was all they had to keep house with all their days: with which they lived comfortably, and died triumphantly, bequeathing the promise to their children, not doubting, because God

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

Reason First. Because it is no easy work to make use of this truth, how plain and clear soever it now appears, in great plunges of temptation, that God is almighty. To vindicate this name of God from those evil reports which Satan and carnal reason raise against it, requires a strong faith indeed. I confess this principle is a piece of natural divinity. That light which finds out a Deity will evince, if followed close, this God to be almighty; yet in a carnal heart, it is like a rusty sword, hardly drawn out of the scabbard, and so of little or no use. Such truths are so imprisoned in natural conscience, that they seldom get a fair hearing in the sinner's bosom, till God gives them a jail-delivery, and brings them out of their house of bondage, where they are shut up in unrighteousness with a high hand of his convincing Spirit. Then, and not till then, the soul will believe [that] God is holy, merciful, almighty; nay, some of God's peculiar people, and not the meanest for grace amongst them, have had their faith for a time set in this slough, [and] much ado to get over these difficulties and improbabilities which sense and reason have objected, so as to rely on the almighty power of God, with a notwithstanding. Moses himself [was] a star of the first magnitude for grace, yet see how his faith blinks and twinkles till he wades out the temptation: 'The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them?'

Num. 11:21, 22. This holy man had lost the sight for a time of the almighty power of God, and now he projecting how this should be done; as if he had said in plain terms, How can this be accomplished? For so God interprets his reasoning: 'And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's hand waxed short?' ver. 23. So Mary, 'Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died,' John 11:32. And her sister Martha, 'Lord, by this time he stinketh,' ver. 39. Both [were] gracious women, yet both betrayed the weakness of their faith on the almighty power of Christ; one limiting him to place—'f thou hadst been here,' he had not died; as if Christ could not have saved his life absent as well as present—sent his health to him as well as brought it with him;—the other to time—'now he stinketh;' as if Christ had brought his physic too late, and the grave would not deliver up its prisoner at Christ's command. And thou hast such a high opinion of thyself, Christian, that thy faith needs not thy utmost care and endeavour for further establishment on the almighty power of God, when thou seest such as these dash their foot against this kind of temptation?

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

dry breaks or throws away his pitcher.

Reason Third. Because God is very tender of this flower of his crown, this part of his name: indeed we cannot spell it right and leave out this letter, for that is God's name, whereby he is known by all his creatures. Now man may be called wise, merciful, mighty: God only, all-wise, all-merciful, almighty; so that when we leave out this syllable all, we nickname God, and call him by his creature's name, which he will not answer to. Now the tenderness that God shows to this prerogative of his appears in three particulars.

1. In the strict command he lays on his people to give him the glory of his power. 'Neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid,' but 'sanctify the Lord of hosts himself,' Isa. 8:12, 13; that is, in this sad posture of your affairs, when your enemies associate, and you seem a lost people to the eye of reason, not able to contest with [those] united powers which beset you on every side, I charge you, sanctify me in giving me the glory of my almighty power. Believe that your God is able of himself, without any other, to defend you, and destroy them.

2. In his severity to his dearest children, when they stagger in their faith, and come not off roundly, without reasoning and disputing the case, to rely on his almighty power. Zacharias did but ask the angel, 'whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years?' yet for bewraying therein his unbelief, had a sign indeed given him, but such a one as did not only strengthen his faith, but severely punish his unbelief, for he was struck dumb upon the place. God loves his children should believe his word, not dispute his power; so true is that of Luther: 'God loves the obedient, not the cavilling.'⁴ That which gave accent to Abraham's faith was that he was 'fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform,' Rom. 4:21.

3. In the way God takes of giving his choicest mercies and greatest salvations to his people, wherein he lays the scene of his providence, so that when he hath done it may be said, Almighty power was here. And therefore, God commonly puts down those means and second causes, which if they stood about

4. Deus amat curristas non quæristas.

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

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

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

[Of acting our faith on the almighty power of God, AS ENGAGED FOR OUR HELP.]

DOCTRINE SECOND. That it is the saint's duty, and should be their care, not only to believe God Almighty, but also strongly to believe that this almighty power of God is theirs, that is, [is] engaged for their defence and help, so as to make use of it in all straits and temptations. **FIRST,** I shall prove that the almighty power of God is engaged for the Christian's

defence, with the grounds of it. **SECOND,** [I shall prove] why the Christian should strongly act his faith on this.

FIRST. I shall prove that the almighty power of God is engaged for the Christian's defence, with the grounds of it. God brought Israel out of Egypt with an high hand, but did he set them down on the other side of the Red Sea, to find and force their way to Canaan, by their own policy or power? When he had opened the gate of their iron house of bondage, and brought them into the open fields, did he vanish as the angel from Peter, when out of prison? No, 'The Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went,' Deut. 1:31. This doth lively set forth the saint's march to heaven; God brings a soul out of spiritual Egypt by his converting grace, that is, the 'day of his power,' wherein he makes the soul willing to come out of Satan's clutches. Now when the saint is upon his march, all the country riseth upon him. How shall this creature pass the pikes, and get safely by all his enemies' borders? God himself enfolds him in the arm of his everlasting strength. 'We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.' I Peter 1:5. The power of God is that shoulder on which Christ carries his sheep home, rejoicing all the way he goes, Luke 15:5. These everlasting arms of his strength are those eagles' wings, upon which the saints are both tenderly and securely conveyed to glory, Ex. 19:4. There is a five-fold tie or engagement that lies upon God's power to be the saints' life-guard.

First Tie. The near relation he hath to his saints. They are his own dear children; every one takes care of his own—the silly hen, how doth she bustle and bestir herself to gather her brood under her wing when the kite appears? no care like that which nature teacheth. How much more will God, who is the Father of such dispositions in his creature, stir up his whole strength to defend his children? 'He said, They are my people, so he became their Saviour,' Isa. 63:8. As if God had said, Shall I sit still with my hand in my bosom, while my own people are thus misused before my face? I cannot bear it. The mother as she sits in her house hears one shriek, and knowing the voice, cries out, 'O it is my child.' Away she throws all, and runs to him. Thus God takes the alarm of his children's cry: 'I heard Ephraim bemoan-

ing himself, saith the Lord;’ his cry pierced his ear, and his ear affected his bowels, and his bowels called up his power to the rescue of him.

Second Tie. The dear love he beareth to his saints engageth his power. He that hath God's heart cannot want his arm. Love in the creature commands all the other affections, sets all the powers of the whole man on work; thus in God, love sets all his other attributes on work. When once God pitched his thoughts of doing good to lost man, then wisdom fell on projecting the way, almighty power that undertook to raise the fabric according to wisdom's model. All are ready to effect what God saith he likes. Now the believing soul is an object of God's choicest love, even the same with which he loves his Son, John 17:26.

1. God loves the believer as the birth of his everlasting counsel. When a soul believes, then God's eternal purpose and counsel concerning him, whom he chose in Christ before the foundation of the world, and with whom his thoughts went so long big, brings forth. And how must God needs love that creature whom he carried so long in the womb of his eternal purpose? This goodly fabric of heaven and earth had not been built, but as a stage whereon he would in time act what he decreed in heaven of old, concerning the saving of thee, and a few more his elect. And therefore according to the same rate of delight, with which God pleased and entertained himself in the thoughts of this before the world was, must he needs rejoice over the soul now believing, with love and complacency inconceivable; and God having brought his counsel thus far towards its issue, surely will raise all the power he hath, rather than be disappointed of his glory within a few steps of home; I mean, his whole design in the believer's salvation. The Lord who hath chosen his saints Zech. 3, as Christ prays for Joshua their representative, will rebuke Satan and all their enemies.

2. God loves the saints as the purchase of his Son's blood. They cost him dear, and that which is so hardly got shall not be easily lost. He that was willing to expend his Son's blood to gain them, will not deny his power to keep them.

3. God loves the saints for their likeness to himself, so that if he loves himself, he cannot but love himself appearing in them; and as he loves himself in them, so he defends himself in defending them.

What is it in a saint that enrageth hell but the image of God, without which the war would soon be at an end? It is the hatred that the panther hath to man that makes him fly at his picture. ‘For thy sake we are slain all the day long:’ and if the quarrel be God's, surely the saint will not go forth to war at his own cost.

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

Fourth Tie. The saints' dependence on God, and expectation from God in all their straits, oblige his power for their succour. Whither doth a gracious soul fly in any want or danger from sin, Satan, or his instruments, but to his God? As naturally as the cony to her burrow. ‘What time I am afraid,’ saith David, ‘I will trust in thee,’ Ps. 56:3. He tells God he will make bold of his house to step into when taken in any storm, and doth not question his welcome. Thus when Saul hunted him, he left a city of gates and bars to trust God in open field. Indeed all the saints are taught the same lesson, to renounce their own strength, and rely on the power of God; their own policy, and cast themselves on the wisdom of God; their own righteousness, and expect all from the pure mercy of God in Christ, which act of faith is so pleasing to God, that such a soul shall never be ashamed, ‘The expectation of the poor shall not perish,’ Ps. 9:18. A heathen could say, when a bird scared by a hawk flew into his bosom, I will not betray

thee unto thy enemy, seeing thou comest for sanctuary unto me. How much less will God yield up a soul unto its enemy when it takes sanctuary in his name, saying, 'Lord, I am hunted with such a temptation, dogged with such a lust, either thou must pardon it, or I am damned; mortify it, or I shall be a slave to it; take me into the bosom of thy love, for Christ's sake; castle me in the arms of thy everlasting strength, it is in thy power to save me from, or give me up into, the hands of my enemy. I have no confidence in myself or any other: into thy hands I commit my cause, my life, and rely on thee.' This dependence of a soul undoubtedly will awaken the almighty power of God for such an one's defence. He hath sworn the greatest oath that can come out of his blessed lips, even by himself, that such as thus fly for refuge to hope in him, shall have strong consolation, Heb. 6:17. This indeed may give the saints the greater boldness of faith to expect kindly entertainment when he repair to God for refuge, because he cannot come before he is looked for. God having set up his name and promises as a strong tower, both calls his people into these chambers, and expects they should betake themselves thither.

Fifth Tie. Christ's presence and employment in heaven lays a strong engagement on God to bring his whole force and power into the field upon all occasions for his saints' defence. One special end of his journey to heaven, and abode there, is that he might, as the saints' solicitor, be ever interceding for such supplies and succours of his Father as their exigencies call for; and the more to assure us of the same before he went, he did, as it were, tell us what heads he meant to go upon his intercession when he should come there; one of which was this, that his Father should keep his children while they were to stay in the world from the evil thereof, John 17:15. Neither doth Christ take upon him this work of his own head, but hath the same appointment of his Father for what he now prays in heaven, as he did for what he suffered on earth. He that ordained him a Priest to die for sinners, did not then strip him of his priestly garments, as Aaron, but appoints him to ascend in them to heaven, where he sits a Priest for ever by God's oath. And this office of intercession was erected purely in mercy to believers, that they might have full content given them for the performance of all that

God had promised; so that Jesus Christ lies lieger at court as our ambassador, to see all carried fairly between God and us according to agreement; and if Christ follows his business close, and be faithful in his place to believers, all is well. And doth it not behove him to be so, who intercedes for such dear relations? Suppose a king's son should get out of a besieged city, where he hath left his wife and children, whom he loves as his own soul, and these all ready to die by sword or famine; if supply come not sooner, could this prince, when arrived at his father's house, please himself with the delights of the court, and forget the distress of his family? Or rather would he not come post to his father, having their cries and groans always in his ears, and before he eat or drink, do his errand to his father, and entreat him if ever he loved him, that he would send all the force of his kingdom to raise the siege, rather than any of his dear relations should perish? Surely, sirs, though Christ be in the top of his preferment, and out of the storm in regard of his own person, yet his children left behind in the midst of sins, Satan, and the world's batteries, are in his heart, and shall not be forgotten a moment by him. The care he takes in our business appeared in the speedy despatch he made of his Spirit to his apostles' supply, when he ascended, which as soon almost as he was warm in his seat, at his Father's right hand, he sent, to the incomparable comfort of his apostles and us, that to this day, yea, to the end of the world, do or shall believe on him.

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

First. As it is the end of all promises to be security to our faith, so [it is] of those in particular where his almighty power is expressly engaged, that we may count this attribute our portion, and reap the comfort it yields as freely as one may the crop of his own field. 'Walk before me,' saith God to Abraham,

'I am God Almighty;' set on this as thy portion, and live upon it. The apostle teacheth us what use to make of promises, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' Heb. 13:5; there is the promise, and the inference which he teacheth us from this, follows, 'So we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper,' ver. 6. We, that is, every believer, may boldly say, that is, we may conclude, God will help, not sneakingly, timorously, perhaps he will; but we may boldly assert it in the face of men and devils, because He that is almighty hath said it. Now for a Christian not to strengthen his faith on this incomparably sweet attribute, but to sit down with a few weak unsettled hopes, when he may, yea, ought to be strong in the faith of such promises, what is it but to undervalue the blessing of such promises? As if one should promise another house and land, and bid him make them as sure to himself as the law can bind, and he should take no care to effect this: would it not be interpreted as a slighting of his friend's kindness? Is it a small matter that God passeth over his almighty power by promise to us, and bids us make it as sure to ourselves as we can by faith, and we neglect this, leaving the writings of the promises unsealed on our hearts?

Second. Our obedience and comfort are strong or weak, as our faith is on this principle.

1. Our obedience, that being a child of faith, partakes of its parent's strength or weakness. Abraham being strong on faith, what an heroic act of obedience did he perform in offering up his son! His faith being well set on the power of God, he carries that without staggering which would have laid a weak faith on the ground. No act of faith more strengthens for duty, than that which eyes God's almighty power engaged for its assistance. 'Go in this thy might,' said God to Gideon, 'have not I called thee?' As if he had said, Can I not, will I not carry thee through thy work? Away goes Gideon in the faith of this, and doth wonders. This brought the righteous man from the East to God's foot, though he knew not whither he went, yet he knew with whom he went, God Almighty. But take a soul not persuaded of this, how uneven and unstable is he in his obediential course! Every threat from man, if mighty, dismays him, because his faith [is] not fixed on the Almighty, and therefore sometimes he will shift off a duty to comply with man, and betray his trust into the hands of a

sorry creature, because he hath fleshly eyes to behold the power of a man, but wants a spiritual eye to see God at his back, to protect him with his almighty power; which, were his eyes open to see, he would not be so routed in his thoughts at the approach of a weak creature. 'Should such a man as I flee?' said good Nehemiah, Neh. 6:11. He was newly come from the throne of grace, where he had called in the help of the Almighty, 'O God, strengthen my hands,' ver. 9. And truly, now, he will rather die upon the place, than disparage his God with a dishonorable retreat.

2. The Christian's comfort increaseth or wanes, as the aspect of his faith is to the power of God. Let the soul question that, or his interest in it, and his joy gusheth out, even as blood out of a broken vein. It is true, a soul may scramble to heaven with much ado, by a faith of recumbency, relying on God as able to save, without this persuasion of its interest in God; but such a soul goes with a scant side-wind, or like a ship whose masts are laid by the board, exposed to wind and weather, if others better appointed did not tow it along with them. Many fears like waves ever and anon [so] cover such a soul, that it is more under water than above; whereas one that sees itself folded in the arms of almighty power, O how such a soul goes mounting afore the wind, with her sails filled with joy and peace! Let affliction come, storms arise, this blessed soul knows where it shall land and be welcome. The name of God is his harbor, where he puts in as boldly, as a man steps into his own house, when taken in a shower. He hears God calling him into this, and other his attributes, as chambers taken up for him. 'Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers,' Isa. 26:20. God calls them his, and it were foolish modesty not to own what God gives. 'Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength,' Isa. 45:24; that is, I have righteousness in God's righteousness, strength in his strength, so that in this respect Christ can no more say that his strength is his own, and not the believer's, than the husband can say, My body is my own and not my wife's. A soul persuaded of this may sing merrily with the sharpest thorn at his breast; so David, 'My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise,' Ps. 57:7. What makes him so merry in so sad a place as the cave where now he was? he will tell you ver. 1, where you have him nestling himself under the

shadow of God's wings, and now well may he sing care and fear away. A soul thus provided may lie at ease on a hard bed. Do you not think they sleep as soundly who dwell on London-bridge, as they who live at Whitehall or Cheapside, knowing that the waves that roar under them cannot hurt them? even so may the saints rest quietly over the floods of death itself, and fear no ill.

[Use or Application.]

Use First. Is the almighty power of God engaged for the saints' defence? surely then they will have a hard pull, the saints' enemies, who meddle with them who are so far above their match. The devil was so cunning, he would have Job out of his trench, his hedge down before he could fall on. But so desperate are men, they will try the field with the saints, though encircled with the almighty power of God. What folly were it to attempt or sit down before such a city, which cannot be blocked up so as no relief can get in? the way to heaven cannot. In the church's straitest siege, 'there is a river which shall make glad this city of God,' with seasonable succours from heaven. The saints' fresh-springs are all from God, and it is as feasible for sorry man to stop the water-courses of the clouds, as to dam up those streams, which invisibly glide like veins of water in the earth, from the fountain-head of his mercy into the bosom of his people. The Egyptians thought they had Israel in a trap, when they saw them march into such a nook by the sea-side. 'They are entangled, they are entangled;' and truly so they had been irrecoverably, had not that almighty power which led them on, engaged to bring them off with honor and safety. Well, when they are out of this danger; behold they are in a wilderness where nothing is to be had for back and belly, and yet here they shall live for forty years, without trade or tillage, without begging or robbing of any of the neighbor nations; they shall not be beholden to them for a penny in their way. What cannot almighty power do to provide for his people? what can it not do to protect them against the power and wrath of their enemies? Almighty power stood between the Israelites and the Egyptians, so that, poor creatures, they could not so much as come to see their enemies. God sets up a dark cloud as a blind before their eyes, and all the while his eye through the

cloud is looking them into disorder and confusion. And is the Almighty grown weaker now-a-days, or his enemies stronger, that they promise themselves better success? No, neither; but men are blinder than the saints' enemies of old, who sometimes have fled at the appearances of God among his people, crying out, 'Let us flee, for the Lord fighteth for them.' Whereas there be many now-a-days will rather give the honor of their discomfitures to Satan himself, than acknowledge God in the business; more ready to say that the devil fought against them, than God. O you that have not yet worn off the impressions which the almighty power of God hath at any time made upon your spirits, beware of having anything to do with that generation of men, whoever they are. Come not near their tabernacle, cast not thy lot in amongst them, who are enemies to the saints' of the most High; for they are men devoted to destruction. He ripped open the very womb of Egypt, to save the life of Israel his child, *Isa. 43:3*.

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

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

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

1. In agonies of conscience that arise from the greatness of thy sins, fly for refuge into the almighty power of God. Truly, sirs, when a man's sins are displayed in all their bloody colors, and spread forth in all their killing aggravations, and the eye of conscience awakened to behold them through the multiplying or magnifying glass of a temptation, they must needs surprise the creature with horror and amazement, till the soul can say with the prophet, For all this huge host, there is yet more with me than against me. One Almighty is more than many mighties. All these mighty sins and devils, make not one almighty sin, or an almighty devil. Oppose to all the hideous

charges brought against thee by them this only attribute. As the French ambassador once silenced the Spaniard's pride in repeating his master many titles, with one that drowned them all, God himself, when he had aggravated his people's sins to the height, then to show what a God can do, breaks out into a sweet promise: 'I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger;' and why not? 'I am God, and not man,' Hosea 11:9. I will show the almightiness of my mercy. Something like our usual phrase when a child or a woman strikes us, I am a man, and not a child or a woman, therefore I will not strike again. The very considering God to be God, supposeth him almighty to pardon as well as to avenge. And this is some relief. But then to consider it is almighty power in bond and covenant to pardon, this is more. As none can bind God but himself, so none can break the bond himself makes: and are they not his own words, that 'he will abundantly pardon?' Isa. 55:7. He will multiply to pardon, as if he had said, 'I will drop mercy with your sin, and spend all I have, rather than let it be said my good is overcome of your evil.' It fares with the gracious soul in this case as with a captain, that yields his castle upon gracious terms of having his life spared, and he safely conveyed to his house, there to be settled peaceably in his estate and possessions, for all which he hath the general's hand and seal, on which he marches forth; but the rude soldiers assaulting him, and putting him in fear of his life, he appeals to the general, whose honor is now engaged for him, and is presently relieved, and his enemies punished. Thou mayest, poor soul, when accused by Satan, molested by his terrors, say, It is God that justifies; I have his hand to it, that I should have my life given me as soon as I laid down my arms and submitted to him, which I desire to do. Behold, the gates of my heart are open to let the Prince of peace in, and is not the Almighty able to perform his promise? I commit myself to him as unto a faithful Creator.

2. Improve this almighty power of God, and thy interest therein, in temptations to sin, when thou art overpowered, and fliest before the face of thy strong corruption, or fearest thou shalt one day fall by it; make bold to take hold of this attribute, and reinforce thyself from it again to resist, and in resisting, to believe a timely victory over it. The Almighty God

stands in sight of thee while thou art in the valley fighting, and stays but for a call from thee when distressed in battle, and then he will come to thy rescue. Jehoshaphat cried when in the throng of his enemies, and the Lord helped him; much more mayest thou promise thyself his succor in thy soul combats. Betake thyself to the throne of grace with that promise, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you;' and before thou urgest it, the more to help thy faith, comfort thyself with this, that though the word almighty is not expressed, yet it is implied in this and every promise, and thou mayest without adding a tittle to the Word of God, read it in thy soul; sin shall not have dominion over you, saith the Almighty God, for this and all his attributes are the constant seal to all his promises. Now, soul, put the bond in suit, fear not the recovery, it is debt, and so due. He is able whom thou suest, and so there is no fear of losing the charge of the suit; and he that was so gracious to bind himself when he was free, will be so faithful, being able, to perform now he is bound; only, while thou expectest the performance of the promise, and the assistance of the almighty power against thy corruptions, take heed that thou keep under the shadow of this attribute, and condition of this promise, Ps. 91:1. The shadow will not cool except in it. What good to have the shadow, though of a mighty rock, when we sit in the open sun? to have almighty power engaged for us, and we throw ourselves out of the protection thereof by bold sallies into the mouth of temptation? The saints' falls have been when they run out of their trench and hold; for, like the conies, they are a weak people in themselves, and their strength lies in the rock of God's almightiness, which is their habitation.

3. Christian, improve this, when oppressed with the weight of any duty and service, which in thy place and calling lies upon thee. Perhaps thou findest thy duty of thy calling too heavy for thy weak shoulders, make bold by faith to lay the heaviest end of thy burden on God's shoulder, which is thine (if a believer) as sure as God can make it by promise. When at any time thou art sick of thy work, and ready to think with Jonas to run from it, encourage thyself with that of God to Gideon, whom he called from the flail to thrash the mountains, 'Go in this thy might,' hath not God called thee? Fall to the work God sets thee about, and thou engagest his strength for thee.

The way of the Lord is strength. Run from thy work, and thou engagest God's strength against thee; he will send some storm or other after thee to bring home his runaway servant. How oft hath the coward been killed in a ditch, or under some hedge, when the valiant soldier stood his ground and kept his place got off with safety and honor? Art thou called to suffer? flinch not because thou art afraid, thou shalt never be able to bear the cross; God can lay it so even, thou shalt not feel it, though thou shouldst find no succor till thou comest to the prison door, yea, till thou hast one foot on the ladder, or thy neck on the block, despair not. 'In the mount will the Lord be seen.' And in that hour he can give thee such a look of his sweet face, as shall make the blood come in the ghastly face of a cruel death, and appear lovely in thy eye for his sake. He can give thee so much comfort in hand, as thou shalt acknowledge God is aforehand with thee, for all thy shame and pain thou canst endure for him; and if it should not amount to this, yet so much as it will bear all the charges thou canst be put to in the way, lies ready told in the promise, 1 Cor. 10:13. Thou shalt have it at sight, and this may satisfy a Christian, especially if he considers, though he doth not carry so much of heaven's joy about him to heaven as others, yet he shall meet it as soon as he comes to his Father's house, where it is reserved for him. In a word, Christian, rely upon thy God, and make thy daily applications to the throne of grace for continual supplies of strength; you little think how kindly he takes it, that you will make use of him, the oftener the better, and the more you come for, the more welcome. Else why would Christ have told his disciples, 'Hitherto you have asked nothing,' but to express his large heart in giving? loath to put his hand to his purse for a little, and therefore by a familiar kind of rhetoric puts them to rise higher in asking, as Naaman when Gehazi asks one talent, entreats him to take two. Such a bountiful heart thy God hath, while thou art asking a little peace and joy, he bids thee open thy mouth wide and he will fill it. Go and ransack thy heart, Christian, from one end to the other, find out thy wants, acquaint thyself with all thy weaknesses, and set them before the Almighty, as the widow her empty vessels before the prophet; hadst thou more than thou canst bring, thou mayest have them all filled. God hath strength enough to give, but

he hath no strength to deny. Here the Almighty himself (with reverence be it spoken) is weak; even a child, the weakest in grace of his family that can but say father, is able to overcome him; and therefore let not the weakness of thy faith discourage thee. No greater motive to the bowels of mercy to stir almighty power to relieve thee than thy weakness, when pleaded in the sense of it. The pale face and thin cheeks, I hope, move more with us, than the canting language of a stout sturdy beggar; thus [with] that soul that comes laden in the sense of his weak faith, love, patience, the very weakness of them carries an argument along with them for succor.

OBJECTION ANSWERED

[A grand objection that some disconsolate souls may raise against the former discourse, ANSWERED.]

OBJECTION. O but, saith some disconsolate Christian, I have prayed again and again for strength against such a corruption, and to this day my hands are weak, and these sons of Zeruah are so strong, that I am ready to say, All the preachers do but flatter me, that do pour their oil of comfort upon my head, and tell me I shall at last get the conquest of these mine enemies, and see that joyful day wherein with David, I shall sing to the Lord, for delivering me out of the hands of all mine enemies. I have prayed for strength for such a duty, and find it come off as weakly and dead-heartedly as before. If God be with me by his mighty power to help me, why then is all this befallen me?

Answer First. Look once again, poor heart, into thy own bosom, and see whether thou findest not some strength sent unto thee, which thou didst overlook before; this may be, yea, is very ordinary in this case, when God answers our prayer no in the letter, or when the thing itself is sent, but it comes in at the back-door, while we are expecting it at the fore; and truly thus the friend thou art looking for may be in thine house and thou not know it. Is not this thy case, poor soul? Thou hast been praying for strength against such a lust, and now thou wouldst have God presently put forth his power to knock it on the head

and lay it for dead, that it should never stir more in thy bosom. Is not this the door thou hast stood looking for God to come in at? And [yet there is] no sight or news of thy God's coming that way. Thy corruption yet stirs, it may be is now more troublesome than before. Now thou askest where is the strength promised to thy relief? Let me entreat thee before thou layest down this sad conclusion against thy God or self, [to] see whether he hath not conveyed in some strength by another door. Perhaps thou hast not strength to conquer it so soon as thou desirest; but hath he not given further praying strength against it? Thou prayest before, but now more earnestly, all the powers of thy soul are up to plead with God. Before, thou wast more favorable and moderate in thy request, now thou hast a zeal, thou canst take no denial, yea, [will] welcome anything in the room of corruption. Would God but take thy sin and send a cross, thou wouldst bless him. Now, poor soul, is this nothing? [Is this] no strength? Had not thy God reinforced thee, thy sin would have weakened thy spirit of prayer, and not increased it. David began to recover himself when he began to recover his spirit of prayer. The stronger the cry, the stronger the child, I warrant you. Jacob wrestled, and this is called his strength, Hos. 12:3. It appeared, there was much of God in him when he could take such hold of the Almighty as to keep it, though God seemed to shake him off. If thus thou art enabled, soul, to deal with the God of heaven, no fear but thou shalt be much more able to deal with sin and Satan. If God hath given thee so much strength to wrestle with him above and against denials, thou hast prevailed with the stronger of the two. Overcome God, and he will overcome the other for thee. Again, perhaps thou hast been praying for further strength to be communicated to thee in duty, that thou might be more spiritual, vigorous, united, sincere, and the like, therein, and yet thou findest thy old distempers hanging about thee, as if thou hadst never acquainted God with thy ail. Well, soul, look once again into thy bosom with an unprejudiced eye, though thou dost not find the assisting strength thou prayed for, yet hast thou no more self-abasing strength? perhaps the annoyance thou hast from these remaining distempers in duty, occasion thee to have a meaner opinion of all thy duties than ever, yea, they make thee abhor

thyself in the sense of these, as if thou hadst so many loathsome vermin around thee. Job's condition on the dunghill, with all his botches and running sores on his body, appears desirable to thee, in comparison of thine, whose soul, thou complainest, is worse than his body. O this afflicts my soul deeply, that thou shouldst appear before the Lord with such a dead divided heart, and do his work worst that deserves best at thy hands. And is all this nothing? Surely, Christian, thine eyes are held as much as Hagar's, or else thou wouldst see the streamings forth of divine grace in this frame of thy heart; surely others will think God hath done a mighty work in thy soul. What harder and more against the hair than to bring our proud hearts to take shame for that whereof they naturally boast and glory? And is it nothing for thee to tread on the very neck of thy duties, and count them matter of thy humiliation and abasing, which others make the matter of their confidence and self-rejoicing? Good store of virtue hath gone from Christ to dry this issue of pride in thy heart, which sometimes in gracious ones [so] runs through and through their duties, that it is seen, or may be, by those that have less grace than themselves.

Answer Second. Christian, candidly interpret God's dealings with thee. Suppose it be as thou sayest; thou hast pleaded the promise, and waited on the means, and yet findest no strength from all these receipts, either in thy grace or comfort. Now take heed of charging God foolishly, as if God were not what he promiseth; this were to give that to Satan which he is all this while gaping for. It is more becoming the dutiful disposition of a child, when he hath not presently what he writes for to his father, to say, My father is wiser than I. His wisdom will prompt him what and when to send to me, and his fatherly affections to me his child will neither suffer him to deny anything that is good, or slip the time that is seasonable. Christian, thy heavenly Father hath gracious ends that hold his hand at present, or else thou hadst ere this heard from him.

1. God may deny further degrees of strength to put thee on the exercise of that thou hast more carefully. As a mother doth by her child that is learning to go, she sets it down, and stands some distance from it, and bids it come to her. The child feels its legs weak and cries for the mother's help, but

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

2. God may deny the Christian such assisting strength in duty, or mortifying the strength of corruption, as he desires, purely on a gracious design that he may thereby have an advantage of expressing his love in such a way, as shall most kindly work upon the ingenuity of the soul to love God again. Perhaps, Christian, thou prayest for a mercy thou wantest, or for deliverance out of some great affliction, and in the duty thou findest not more assistance than ordinary, yea, many distractions of spirit in it, and misgiving thoughts with unbelieving fears after it. Well, notwithstanding those defects in thy duty, yet God hears thy prayer, and sends in the mercy on purpose that he may greaten his love in thine eye, and make it more luscious and sweet to thy taste, from his accepting thy weak services, and passing by the distempers of thy spirit. Here is less strength for the duty, that thou mayest have more love in the mercy; nothing will affect a gracious heart more than such a consideration. See it in David, 'I said in my haste, All men are liars. What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?' Ps. 116:11, 12. As if David had said, Notwithstanding all the comfortable messages I had from God by his prophets concerning this

matter, my own prayers, and those remarkable providences, which carried in them a partial answer to them, and performance of what was promised, yet I betrayed much unbelief, questioning the truth of the one, and the return of the other; and hath God, notwithstanding all my infirmities, fulfilled my desire, and performed his promise? O what shall I render unto the Lord? Thus David reads God's mercy through the spectacles of his own weakness and infirmity, and it appears great; whereas if a mercy should come in, as an answer to a duty managed with such strength of faith, and height of other graces, as might free him and his duty from usual infirmities, this might prove a snare, and occasion some self-applauding, rather than mercy-admiring thoughts in the creature.

3. God may communicate the less of his assisting strength, that he may show the more of his supporting strength, in upholding weak grace. We do not wonder to see a man of strong constitution that eats his bread heartily and sleep soundly, live. But for a crazy body, full of ails and infirmities, to be so patched and shored up by the physician's art that he stands to old age, this begets some wonder in the beholders. It may be thou art a poor trembling soul, thy faith is weak, and thy assaults from Satan strong, thy corruptions stirring and active, and thy mortifying strength little, so that in thy opinion they rather gain ground on thy grace, than give ground to it. Ever and anon thou art ready to think thou shalt be cast as a wreck upon the devil's shore; and yet to this day thy grace lives, though full of leaks. Now is it not worth the stepping aside to see this strange sight? A broken ship with masts and hull rent and torn, thus towed along by almighty power through an angry sea, and armadas of sins and devils, safely into its harbor. To see a poor dilling or rush-candle in the face of the boisterous wind, and not blown out! In a word, to see a weak stripling in grace held up in God's arms till he beats the devil craven! This God is doing in upholding thee. Thou art one of those babes, out of whose mouth God is perfecting his praise, by ordaining such strength for thee, that thou, a babe in grace, shalt yet foil a giant in wrath and power.

Answer Third. If after long waiting for strength from God, it be as thou complainest, inquire whether the τὸ καταέχου, that which hinders, be not found

in thyself. The head is the seat of animal spirits, yet there may be such obstructions in the body as the other members may for a time be deprived of them; till the passage be free between Christ thy head and thee, thy strength will not come, and therefore be willing to inquire,

1. Hast thou come indeed to God for strength to perform duty, to mortify corruption and the like? Perhaps thou wilt say, Yes, I have waited on those ordinances which are the way in which he hath promised to give out strength. But is this all? Thou mayest come to them, and not wait on God in them. Hast thou not carnally expected strength from them, and so put the ordinances in God's stead? Hath not the frame of thy spirit some affinity with theirs, 'We will go into such a city, and buy and sell, and get gain?' James 4:13. Hath not thy heart said, I will go and hear such a man, and get comfort, and strength? And dost thou wonder thou art weak, barren and unfruitful? Are ordinances God, that they should make you strong or comfortable? Thou mayest hear them answer thee, poor soul, as the king to the woman in the siege of Samaria. Help, O prayer, sayest thou, or, O minister; how can they help except the Lord help? These are but Christ's servants. Christ keeps the key of his wine cellar; they cannot so much as make you drink when you come to their master's house; and therefore, poor soul, stay not short of Christ, but press through all the crowd of ordinances, and ask to speak with Jesus, to see Jesus, and touch him, and virtue will come forth.

2. Ask thy soul whether thou hast been thankful for that little strength thou hast. Though thou art not of that strength in grace to run with the foremost and hold pace with the tallest of thy brethren, yet thou art thankful that thou hast any strength at all, though it be but to cry after them whom thou seest outstrip thee in grace, this is worth thy thanks. All in David's army attained not to be equal with his few worthies in prowess and honor, and yet did not cashier themselves: thou hast reason to be thankful for the meanest place in the army of saints, the least communications of gospel-mercy and grace must not be overlooked. As soon as ever Moses with his army was through the sea, they strike up before they stir from the bank side, and acknowledge the wonderful appearance of God's power and mercy for them,

though this was but one step in their way; [for] a howling wilderness presented itself to them, and [though] they [were] not able to subsist a few days with all their provision, for all their great victory, yet Moses will praise God for this handsel of mercy. This holy man knew the only way to keep credit with God, so as to have more, was to keep touch, and pay down his praise for what was received. If thou wouldst have fuller communications of divine strength, own God in what he hath done. Art thou weak? Bless God thou hast life. Dost thou through feebleness often fail in duty, and fall into temptation? Mourn in the sense of these; yet bless God in that thou dost not live in a total neglect of duty, out of a profane contempt thereof, and instead of falling through weakness, thou dost not lie in the mire of sin through the wickedness of thy heart. The unthankful soul may thank itself it thrives no better.

3. Art thou humble under the assistance and strength God hath given thee? Pride stops the conduit. If the heart begin to swell, it is time for God to hold his hand, and turn the cock, for all that is poured on such a soul runs over into self-applauding, and so it is as water spilt, in regard of any good it doth the creature, or any glory it brings to God. A proud heart and a lofty mountain are never fruitful. Now beside the common ways that pride discovers itself, as by undervaluing others, and overvaluing itself, and such like, you shall observe two other symptoms of it. (1.) It appears in bold adventures, when a person runs into the mouth of temptation, bearing himself up on the confidence of his grace received. This was Peter's sin, by which he was drawn to engage further than became an humble faith, running into devil's quarters, and so became his prisoner for a while. The good man, when in his right temper, had thoughts low enough of himself, as when he asked his Master, Is it I? But he that feared at one time lest he might be the traitor, at another cannot think so ill of himself, as to suspect he should be the denier of his Master. What, he? No, though all the rest should forsake him, yet he would stand to his colors. Is this thy case, Christian? Possibly God hath given thee much of his mind; art thou skilful in the Word of life, and therefore thou darest venture to breathe in corrupt air, as if only the weak spirits of less knowing Christians exposed them to be infected

with the contagion of error and heresy. Thou hast a large portion of grace, or at least thou thinkest so, and ventur'st to go where an humble-minded Christian would fear his heels should slip under him. Truly, now thou temptest God to suffer thy lock to be cut, when thou art so bold to lay thy head in the lap of a temptation. (2.) Pride appears in the neglect of those means whereby the saints' graces and comforts are to be fed when strongest. Maybe, Christian, when thou art under fears and doubts, then God hath thy company, thou art oft with thy pitcher at his door; but when thou hast got any measure of peace, there grows presently some strangeness between God and thee; thy pitcher walks not as it was wont to these wells of salvation. No wonder if thou, though rich in grace and comfort, goest behind-hand, seeing thou spendest on the old stock, and drivest no trade at present to bring in more. Or if thou dost not thus neglect duty, yet maybe thou dost not perform with that humility which formerly beautified the same: then thou prayed in the sense of thy weakness to get strength, now thou prayest to show thy strength, that others may admire thee. And if once, like Hezekiah, we call in spectators to see our treasure, and applaud us for our gifts and comfort, then it is high time for God, if he indeed love us, to send some messengers, to carry these away from us, which carry our hearts from him.

Answer Fourth. If thy heart doth not smite thee from what hath been said, but thou hast sincerely waited on God, and yet hast not received the strength thou desirest, yet let it be thy resolution to live and die waiting on him. God doth not tell us his time of coming, and it were boldness to set on of our own heads. Go, saith Christ, to his disciples, 'tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high,' Luke 24:49. Thus he saith to thee, Stay at Jerusalem, wait on him in the means he hath appointed, till thou beest endued with further power to mortify thy corruptions, &c. And for thy comfort know,

1. Thy thus persevering to wait on God will be an evidence of strong grace in thee. The less encouragement thou hast to duty, the more [is] thy faith and obedience to bear thee up in duty. He that can trade when times are so dead, that all his ware lies upon his hand, and yet draws not in his hand, but rather trades more and more, sure his stock is great. What! no

comfort in hearing, no ease to thy spirit in praying, and yet more greedy to hear, and more frequent in prayer. O soul, great is thy faith and patience!

2. Assure thyself when thou art at the greatest pinch [that] strength shall come. They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength: when the last handful of meal was dressing, then is the prophet sent to keep the widow's house. When temptation is strong, thy little strength is even spent, and thou ready to yield into the hands of thine enemies, then expect succors from heaven, to enable thee to hold

out under the temptation. Thus with Paul, 'My grace is sufficient for thee,' i.e. there is power from heaven to raise the siege, and drive away the tempter. Thus with Job, when Satan had him at an advantage, then God takes him off, like a wise moderator [who], when the respondent is hard put to it by a subtle opponent, takes him off, when he would else run him down. 'Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. James 5:11.
