

intellectuals ; but who thinketh of being wiser for heaven, of being seasoned with the fear of God ? Most men choke all the motions and inclinations they have in that kind with worldly delights and worldly businesses, being alive to the world and dead to God, thronging their hearts with carnal vanities, but leaving no room for higher and serious thoughts.

But at length be persuaded ; what do men desire but life ? If you know God and Christ with a saving knowledge, you shall have it. (1.) We were made for this end, to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved, 1 Tim. ii. 4. We do not live merely to live, but to make provision for a better life ; not to satisfy our bodies out of God's store-house, but to furnish our souls with grace, and exercise ourselves in his law day and night, that we may know his will concerning us, and provide for a better life, and live according to the directions of his word. (2.) No creature is so bad as man when he degenerateth from his end for which he was created : it is not so much for the sea to break its bounds, or to have a defect in the course of nature, as the degeneration of man. (3.) You live not properly when destitute of the life of God and heavenly wisdom : he doth not live the life of a man, nor preserve the rectitude of his nature.

SERMON CLXII.

I cried with my whole heart ; hear me, O Lord : I will keep thy statutes.—VER. 145.

In these words are—

1. An allegation, *I cried with my whole heart.*
2. A petition, *hear me.*
3. A promise of obedience, *I will keep thy statutes.*

1. In the allegation we have a description of prayer, by the two adjuncts of it :—

- [1.] Intension and fervency, ‘*I cried.*’
- [2.] The sincerity and integrity of it, ‘*With my whole heart.*’

2. The petition is for audience ; only, what we translate ‘*hear me,*’ is in the Hebrew ‘*answer me.*’ Now this being a general, it is uncertain what he prayed for : it may be for deliverance out of trouble ; for in the 146th verse it is ‘*save me,*’ but in the 149th verse it is ‘*quicken me,*’ which implieth the vigour of the spiritual life, or grace to keep God's statutes. Whether for the one or the other, David would be heard.

3. Here is a promise of obedience, ‘*I will keep thy statutes ;*’ which is mentioned either as the end and scope of his prayer, ‘*That I may keep thy statutes ;*’ or as a holy vow and promise which the saints are wont to mingle with their prayers, ‘*I will,*’ &c. He would diligently serve God if the Lord would hear him.

First, I begin with the allegation or description of David's carriage in prayer. David devoured not his grief, nor nourished his unbelief, but opened his heart unto God, and that in an affectionate manner :

he did not call, but cry. Crying noteth vehemency and earnestness, and is opposite to careless formality and deadness. The note from thence is—

Doct. That there is a holy vehemency and fervour required in prayer.

Here I shall show—

1. That we may cry.
2. That we must cry.
3. Wherein it consisteth.

First, We may cry in our afflictions. David doth so for help and relief, and it is not inconsistent with patience for us to do so; for our Lord Jesus had his cries, Heb. v. 7, in the extremity of his sufferings, without any impeachment of his courage and patience. So did Job, chap. xxx. 28, 'I went mourning without the sun; I stood up and I cried in the congregation.' It argues we have a sense of our condition, and are under a pinching necessity; and therefore may complain to God, though not of God. They are sullen and obstinate and senseless that have no feeling, and so no complaint to make, when God lasheth them.

Secondly, We must cry. For—

1. The spirit of grace was given for this end: Rom. viii. 15, 'Ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father;' not to say, but cry. He assisteth us by groans: Rom. viii. 26, 'The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.' And such a spirit of prayer should we all labour for, to come to God with affection and humble and sensible groans, if we cannot come with the pomp of gifts. There is good sense in brokenness of heart, though it be accompanied with brokenness of speech; for God knoweth what a groan meaneth, and will not refuse the work of his Spirit.

2. Because the saints have all done so. Their way of praying is crying: Ps. xviii. 6, 'In my distress I cried unto the Lord;' Ps. xxxiv. 6, 'This poor man cried unto the Lord;' Ps. cxxx. 1, 'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord;' and Ps. lv. 17, 'At noon will I pray, and cry aloud;' and in many other places. Others can say a prayer, but they cry it out.

3. These cries are heard and answered; as in all the former places, so Ps. xxii. 5, 'Our fathers cried unto thee, and were delivered;' Ps. xxxiv. 17, 'The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth;' *βοηθέω*, the word 'to help' is *εἰς βοήν θεῶν* to run to the cry. An arrow drawn with full strength will pierce deep.

4. Other prayers are not comely. It doth not become God to whom we pray; dead service doth not become the living God: Mal. i. 14, 'Cursed be the deceiver which hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great king, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.' Slight dealing in God's service argueth mean thoughts of God. It doth not become the Spirit by whom we pray, as in the first reason; nor doth it become the blessings for which we pray: God will not give a mercy till it be valued. If we be indifferent, and pray for things of course, without any esteem of them, we bespeak our

own denial. Then we undervalue the grace we seek if we seek it so as if we cared not whether we obtained our request or no, for form's sake we must say something. When things are prized we are earnest, and God will have us earnest, to ask, seek, and knock, Mat. vii. 7. If you have good things, you must do so, and will do so, before you have them. Nor doth it become the state of want wherein you pray. Where there is real indigence and felt necessity, it will sharpen your affections and put an accent upon your prayers. You will not tell a tale or a cold story of your own wants, but cry aloud for help : Jonah ii. 2, 'I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord.' And the saints cry day and night, Luke xviii. 18. A true sense of want will sharpen our sluggish desires ; the hunger-bitten beggar will not easily be put off.

Thirdly, Wherein this crying consisteth.

1. In the earnestness of the affection, not in the loudness of the voice : Gal. iv. 6, 'He hath sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba Father.' It is a cry, not of the mouth, but of the heart ; it lieth not in the lifting up of the external voice, or the agitation of the bodily spirits, but the serious bent and frame of the spirit, Rom. viii. 26, *σπαραγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις*, inward groans, and holy meltings and breathings of soul after God. Moses cried after God, Exod. xiv. 18 ; but we hear of no words which Moses spake. We hear of Israel's crying, and have an account of their words, hot and full of impatience, ver. 10 ; but not a word that Moses said, yet he cried unto the Lord. Israel was in straits, the Red Sea before, the Egyptians behind. *Clamabat populus, et non audiebatur : tacebat Moses, et audiebatur*, saith Ambrose. Moses' silence was sooner heard than their cry. Our groans and tears have a language which God understands. It is said, 1 Sam. i. 13, that 'Hannah spake in her heart, only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard.' That is the better crying, in sighs and groans, rather than words ; as the child that cannot speak will cry and make moan for the breast. God hath heard the cry of the heart without that of the tongue, but never the cry of the tongue without that of the heart. *Quibus arteriis opus est, si pro sonitu audiamur !*—what lungs and sides must we have, if the loudness of the voice did it ! A dumb beggar gets an alms at Christ's gate if he can but make signs, when his tongue cannot plead for him.

2. This spiritual crying is not the earnestness of carnal affections ; that is stirred up by the flesh, but this cry is stirred up by the Spirit, who maketh request, *κατὰ Θεόν*, Rom. viii. 27. God should have work enough to do if he did answer all men's prayers. Some would set him a task to provide meat for this, others for that lust. This man prayeth heartily for his pleasures, another for honour, another for preferment, another to satisfy his revenge. A carnal spring may send forth high tides of affection, James iv. 3 ; but few seek grace to serve God : they would make God serve with their sins. These are not the groans and breathings of the Spirit, but the cructations and belches of the flesh. Therefore the vehemency of the affection is not only to be regarded, but the regularity, that they be not stirred up by the flesh, but guided by the Spirit.

3. It is not a mere natural fervency ; that is the cry of nature after

ease, but not the cry of grace after God, and is but howling in God's account, Hosea vii. 14. The heart is not affected with that which is the true misery, sin and the wrath of God; nor sincerely engaged to God, from whom they expect help: and then how instant and earnest soever men be to be rid of their burden, their prayers are but like the moanings of the beasts under pain, and the howling of dogs, or the gaping of hungry ravens, Ps. cxlvii. It is lawful to ask ease, but we must ask in a spiritual manner. It is lawful to pray for temporal blessings, but not in the first place, or with the neglect of better things. Prayer properly is the vent of grace, and the desires of a renewed heart expressed to God, Zech. xii. 10.

Use 1. To reprove most men for their deadness and carelessness in prayer. Prayer is a part of natural worship. All that will acknowledge God and a providence will acknowledge a necessity of praying to God, especially in their straits. The pagan mariners cried every man to his god in a tempest, Jonah i. 6; but though all will pray in one sort or other, yet few pray in good earnest. Some say a prayer, but they do not pray in prayer, James v. 17. Elijah prayed earnestly. Their prayers are conceived in a cold and customary track of devotion. Others flow in words without spirit and life; their tongue is as the pen of a ready writer, but the heart is dead and carelessly affected, for they are indifferent whether they be heard or not. Prayer is indeed the work of their invention, but not the expression of their spiritual desire. The mind conceiveth a rational prayer, but the heart is not poured out before God; and so it is discoursing rather than crying. Words are the outside of prayer, sighs and groans lie nearer the heart, and do better discover the temper of it, and are more regarded by God than all the charms of speech: Ps. vi. 8, 'The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.' Tears have a language which our Father understandeth; a want of affection is more than a defect of words. Broken words with a spiritual affection do more than a well-set speech with unbrokenness of heart. Others have a natural fervency, but not renewed affections; pray from their own interest, or pray passionately for carnal things: Num. xi. 4, 'They fell a-lusting, and wept, saying, Who will give us flesh?' They may be importunate for their own ease and welfare: 'Give me children or else I die,' saith passionate Rachel. Natural desires are very passionate, yea, for spiritual things on their own terms. Would not a man desire pardon and heaven? Whose heart doth not engage him to look after them? Some that are renewed yet are too cold in prayer, do not cry. It is not enough to have the qualification of the person, but the prayer must be qualified also, James v. 16, *δέησις ἐνεργουμένη*; it must be a well-wrought prayer, otherwise it availeth not; yea, our earnestness must increase according to the weight and moment of what we pray for. When Peter was in prison the church made instant and earnest prayer, *δέησις ἐκτενής*, Acts xii. 5, as in the margin it is; and Christ had his *ἐκτενέστερον*, Luke xxii. 44. But now the children of God are conscious to themselves of much deadness and drowsiness, and are so low sometimes that they are not heard, scarce breathe in prayer, so far from crying. But what is the reason of this carelessness?

1. Want of sense. They have no feeling of their wants, and there-

fore pray perfunctorily. The poor in spirit, the mourner, and meek, are put before the desirer, Mat. v. Men must be affected with their wants before they be earnest after a supply. Jesus Christ was sensible of his burden, and therefore he 'offered up supplications with strong crying and tears,' Heb. v. 7. And if man were once sensible of his sins by which his Saviour suffered, he would be fervent in his prayers, and most earnestly deprecate the wrath of God, as his Saviour did. A smart sense of wants quickens prayers. If we were always alike affected, as we are in a deep distress, or fears of death, or some notable danger, we should not need many directions to teach us to pray fervently; but because such a sense is soon worn off, our prayers grow cold and careless.

2. As they are tongue-tied through sin, and carnal liberty hath brought an indisposition upon them, 1 John iii. 20, 21. He that hath wronged another will not easily repair to him, and crave his help in straits.

3. Want of spiritual desire. Prayer is but the acting of desire; as desire is more or less, so is our cry in prayer. He that asketh remission of his sins, but doth not thirst after it with an earnest and burning desire, doth but pray for it out of course, and not as it becometh a creature that hath a sense of God's anger against sin. He that asketh the mortification of sin, but doth not desire it out of true desire, flowing from the hatred of sin dwelling in him, doth but pray for form's sake. He that desireth the deliverance of the church, but doth not desire it out of a true love to the church, will never pray heartily and in good earnest for it: Isa. lxii. 1, 'For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace,' &c. A man whose soul truly loveth the interests of the church will be solicitous for it; as Eli trembled for the ark of God, 1 Sam. iv. 13. So when at ease we ask temporal supplies for fashion's sake. God must have the name, though we eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel.

4. Want of reverence to God, and therefore they babble over words without sense and feeling; they do not see him that is invisible: Eccles. v. 1, 2, 'Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God, for God is in heaven and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.' Keep thy heart and affections when thou goest into God's presence; a little outward lip-service is but the sacrifice of fools, an affront to the power and majesty of God: Mal. i. 8, 'Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts.'

5. Want of faith: Mat. xi. 28, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' To the woman of Canaan, that would take no denial, Christ saith, 'O woman, great is thy faith.' The blind man cried after the Son of David, as we run to a rich man that is charitably disposed for an alms. If we were persuaded that we should be the better for coming to God, we should not be so slight and careless in our approaches to him.

Use 2. To press you to this crying or holy vehemency in prayer.

The apostle biddeth us to 'continue instant in prayer,' *προσκαρτερῶντες*, continue with all your might in prayer: Col. iv. 12, *ἀγωνιζόμενος*, 'Labouring fervently in prayer for you.' The word signifieth to be striving in a battle, and in an agony for them: it hath life in it. But what is it?

1. When the heart worketh in prayer as before.

2. When you follow the suit, and will not give over praying: Luke xviii. 1, 'He spake a parable to them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;' Luke xi. 8, *διὰ τὴν ἀναίδειαν*, 'Because of his importunity he will rise,' &c. The prophet telleth God plainly what he would do: Isa. lxii. 1, 'For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,' &c. So Jacob: Gen. xxxii. 26, 'I will not let thee go unless thou bless me.' *Absque te non recedam*.

3. When deaf to disappointments and discouragements from without, from within, from himself, from God himself: 1 Sam. xii. 23, 'God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you,' &c.; notwithstanding the many objections in his heart, what God would do to a rebellious people. So Elijah when the heavens were as brass and the clouds as iron; and blind Bartimeus: Mark x. 48, 'Many charged him that he should hold his peace, but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.' When God seemeth to cast out prayer, to give no answer, or a contrary one. So Daniel when forbidden to pray: Dan. vi. 10, 'When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house and prayed three times a day as afore-time; he doth not make one suit the less, or abate one jot of his zeal. To cleave to God when he seemeth to thrust us from him, Job xiii. 15, this is a holy obstinacy, very acceptable unto God. The woman of Canaan standeth fending and proving with Christ, till he giveth her satisfaction; then 'be it unto thee as thou wilt.' When we turn discouragements into arguments and motives of believing, and draw nearer to Christ the more he seemeth to drive us from him. However God wrestle with such for a while, it is with a purpose to give faith the victory, and to yield us himself to do for us what our souls desire of him. You pray and God keepeth silence: 'He answered her not a word,' Mat. xv. 23. It is not said he heard not a word, but he answered her not a word; these two differ. Christ often heareth when he doth not answer. His not answering is indeed an answer, and speaks this, Pray on, and continue your crying still; the door is kept bolted that you may knock again. Afterwards a rebuke. First, he answereth not a word, then giveth an answer to the disciples, not to the woman, 'I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,' and then 'It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs.' But she turned the discouragement into an argument,' and she said, 'Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.'

4. Holy fervency and vehemency will be argumentative, and plead with God; as Abraham: Gen. xviii. 25, 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' So Jacob: Gen. xxxii. 9, Jacob pleadeth God's promise; Return unto thy father's house; I will deal well with thee; Lord, I undertook not this journey but upon this encouragement. The

little honour God hath by the church's calamities, Ps. xlv. 12; Isa. lii. 4, 5. The praise God will have from his people, Ps. cxlii. 6. Do it, as David in the text, 'I will keep thy statutes.' The chief arguments are—God's covenant: Ps. lxxiv. 22, 'Arise, O God, plead thine own cause; remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily. Have respect to thy covenant.' The merits of Christ: Lord, hear for the Lord's sake. Desire is witty to find out arguments and reasoning to enforce the things we sue for.

But how shall we get it?

[1.] Have a sincere desire to the things asked. We will cry for what we value and earnestly desire: Prov. ii. 3-5, 'If thou criest for knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seek for her as for silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.'

[2.] Be persuaded of the Lord's willingness to hear and power to help. A rich and bountiful person, a beggar will not let him go, if he see only a rich man: Mat. viii. 2, 'Lord, if thou wilt thou canst;' it is in the power of your hand to help us. But is not God willing also? Suppose it be an uncertainty, yet cry mightily unto God, 'Who can tell that he will not repent?' Jonah iii. 8, 9. If there be but a possibility, yet try what importunity will do: Ps. lvii. 2, 'I will cry unto God most high, unto God who performeth all things for me.' He hath heard once, and will again.

[3.] Beg the assistance of the Spirit. Our necessities are not sharp enough to quicken our affections, they need the secret influence of grace; it is his work to set us a-groaning and crying to God. How well are we provided for, with an advocate and notary: Rom. viii. 26; Jude 20.

[4.] Let us rouse up ourselves: Isa. lxiv. 7, 'There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee;' Psa. lvii. 8, 'Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp; I myself will awake early.' We must ἀναζωπυρεῖν 'stir up the gift of God, which is in us,' 2 Tim. i. 6.

[5.] Let us take heed we do not quench the Spirit, 1 Thes. v. 19, bring deadness on our hearts by carnal liberty. So much enlarged as we are to the flesh, so much straitened in the spirit. Where desires are after other things, there will be little delight in prayer.

[6.] The way to be fervent is to be frequent and often with God. A key seldom turned rusts in the lock. The fire of the sanctuary was never to go out. By great interruptions we lose what we have wrought: 'The way of the Lord is strength to the upright, but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity,' Prov. x. 29.

I come now to the second qualification, 'With my whole heart;' which importeth his integrity and sincerity in praying.

Doct. Our prayers to God must be sincere as well as fervent.

The heart must be in them, and the whole heart. This noteth—

1. Seriousness, that we heed what we say, otherwise we do not pour out our hearts before God. It is so far from being a spiritual act that it is not a rational act, but like the parrots speaking by rote, or as children say their prayers; and we must not be always children. Surely we do not speak to God as God, as an all-seeing Spirit, if we

do not mind what we say, John iv. 24; and Prov. xxviii. 23, 'Burning lips and a wicked heart are as a potsherd covered with silver dross.'

2. A hearty desire or affectionateness. Praying from memory and invention, and praying from affection, are two distinct things; yea, praying from conscience, and praying from the heart. Many times the mind is in prayer when the heart is not in it. The mind or conscience dictates what is fit to be asked, but the heart doth not consent, or not urge it to make any such suit to God; and so the prayer is repeated in the very making: Ps. lxvi. 18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me.' The understanding judgeth that a meet prayer, but the heart is biassed the contrary way to some known sin. Therefore as David calleth all that is within him to bless God, Ps. ciii. 1, so to pray to him—memory, understanding, conscience, will, affections, all that is within us must attend upon this work; that which God heareth is desire: Ps. x. 17, 'Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.' So Ps. cxlv. 19, 'He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.'

3. The prevalency of these affections. That God and his interest be uppermost in the soul, and the heart be effectually bent towards him; for prayer is not a work barely of our natural faculties, but of grace guiding, ordering, and inclining those faculties; not only a work of understanding and will, but of faith, love, fear, zeal, hatred of sin, temperance, patience, and other virtues, which do bend the heart towards God, and draw it off from other things: and without them the understanding will not be clear, and have any deep sense of the worth of spiritual things, 2 Peter i. 19. Without these, the will is remiss, and they never pursue them in good earnest. We may wish for them, but shall not will them: As Balaam, 'Oh that I might die the death of the righteous! But he loved the wages of iniquity,' 2 Peter ii. 15, and so spake words which his heart allowed not. The affections will be diverted to other things, and we cannot have those longings and strong desires after grace, Ps. cxix. 36; Col. iii. 2; or at best but a little passionate earnestness for the present.

4. A universal care to please God in all things, without harbouring any known sin in our hearts, Ps. lxvi. 18; Ps. xvii. 3, 'Thou has proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing;' nothing contrary to the new covenant, no guile; nothing in his heart contrary to what was in his mouth. So no insincerity found: Job xi. 13–14, 'If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thy hand towards him: if iniquity be in thy hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles.' If you mean to call upon God with any confidence, all that is displeasing to him must be cast out of the heart. This is the best preparation; all filth must be swept out when you come to the holy God, for he will not do us good till we are fit to receive good. Therefore if you mean to stretch out your hand in prayer, thus you must do, then may you lift up your face without spot, have boldness and confidence in prayer; but when the heart is wedded to any vanity, God will not hear: Job xxxv. 13, 'Surely God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it.'

Use. To persuade us to pray with our whole hearts; for—

1. God will not be mocked, Gal. vi. 7; that is in vain. You may venture to mock God, put him off with vain pretences, but it will cost you dear. He knoweth the thoughts afar off, Ps. cxxxix. 2; and Heb. iv. 12-13, 'The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart; neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' Though man cannot find you out, yet God can.

2. God hath expressly told you, 'The prayer of the upright is his delight,' Prov. xv. 8. He will pardon many defects, but he will not pardon want of sincerity, either in the person or prayer. Though you cannot bring the pomp of gifts, or exact righteousness, yet, if sincere, God will delight in you; he measureth your prayer by that.

3. Where there is a moral integrity you do not dissemble; God can find the defect of supernatural integrity: Deut. v. 29, 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee; they have well said in all that they have spoken: oh that there were such an heart in them,' &c. Therefore be sure your lips do not feign, Ps. xvii. 1, and pretend more grace than you have; so that for the main your hearts be upright, seriously, readily bent to please him in all things. To this end—

[1.] The tongue must not only pray, but the heart. How dare you tell God to his face that you love him, and fear him, and trust in him, when there is no such matter? No such forgery as counterfeiting the voice of God's Spirit. The heart should be first and chief in prayer, Ps. xli. 1; and Lam. iii. 4, 'Lift up your hearts with your hands to God in the heavens.' There is the chief voice; the hand without it is nothing.

[2.] You must make conscience of graces as well as gifts, yea, more than gifts: 1 Cor. xii. 31, 'But covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet show I unto you a more excellent way;' with 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2. And bewail unbrokenness of heart more than brokenness of expression; if you chatter like cranes, yet if there be a holy desire in it, God will hear.

[3.] You must pray earnestly in secret as well as in company: Mat. vi. 5, 6, 'When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men: but thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret,' &c. We have more enlargement there, because we represent our own case to God. Mourn apart: Jer. xiii. 17, 'My soul shall weep in secret places.' We are flat, cold, loose, careless in private; strive to speak with the same power, life, holiness in private as you would in public.

[4.] What you would be in prayer, you must be out of prayer: Prov. xxvi. 7, 'The legs of the lame are not equal, so is a parable in the mouth of a fool;' as the legs of the lame, one doth not answer another. They are devout, all of a fire in their prayers, but neglectful of God in their conversations: Eph. vi. 18, 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance;

Prov. xxviii. 9, 'He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.' He doth not live his prayers. We must live in the same frame.

[5.] You must pray as affectionately for heavenly as you would for earthly things. A carnal man's mind and heart is upon worldly things, and spiritual things lie by ; contrary to Mat. vi. 33, where we are bid, 'First to seek the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof,' &c. ; and Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after ; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.' They have no savour for other requests, but can find tender affections for safety, ease, sloth : other petitions do but bear these company ; there is their business with God. If God will give these things, we will give a discharge for other things ; so that their prayers do not come from grace, but nature ; thanks to his natural necessities for all the affections he hath in prayer.

[6.] We must not only have our flashes and good moods. So Balaam : Num. xxiii. 10, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.' So those, John vi. 34, 'Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.' Strange strivings for the present, but it is only for privileges. It is vanishing : Job xxvii. 10, 'Will he delight himself in the Almighty ? will he always call upon God ?' They would have heaven without holiness ; pardon of sin, rather than power against it, or a new heart. He will pray when he seeth his time, as men take strong waters in a pang : he hath a praying fit upon him in adversity, not in prosperity : Hosea v. 15, 'In their affliction they will seek me early.'

[7.] As you pray to God, so you must entirely trust him : James i. 6, 7, 'Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering ; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.' A carnal man wavereth ; he would fain have help from God, but his heart runneth upon other things : Hosea vii. 11, 'Ephraim is like a silly dove without heart ; they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.' Their hearts are seeking to other refuges, however they call to God among the rest. Ahaz would not ask a sign that would engage him to depend upon God, and keep him from running to other shifts. Sometimes he thinketh prayer will do it, and by and by desponds, dareth not trust God upon his prayers ; he knoweth not what course to take, whether to shift for himself, or tarry God's leisure. But one that commits all to God is fixed : Ps. cxii. 7, 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.' He is freed from anxious cares.

SERMON CLXIII.

I cried with my whole heart ; hear me, O Lord ; I will keep thy statutes.—VER. 145.

SECONDLY, Here is the petition, 'Hear me ;' or, as it is in the Hebrew, 'answer me ;' not in words, but deeds.

Doct. God's children when they pray are earnest for an answer.

To give you some instances: Ps. lxxxv. 8, 'I will hear what God the Lord will speak.' A gracious heart doth not make prayer a vain babbling or an empty prattle, but a gracious exercise that will in time get an answer, and obtain a good return or blessing from the Lord. Therefore they are listening and hearkening after news from heaven, if they can hear anything from God, how he receiveth their prayers, and what he will do for them: Micah vii. 7, 'Therefore I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.' They are not only waiting, but observing and watching what cometh in upon prayer; for they are certain it is not breath poured out in the air, but a petition commended to their God, who hath promised to hear them. So Hab. ii. 1, 'I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say to me.' He compareth himself to a watchman that is spying abroad if he can get any intelligence of any approaching comfort. So Ps. v. 3, 'I will pray, and look up;' as Elijah, if he could spy a cloud, any preparation towards mercy.

Reason 1. Because they dare not take God's name in vain, as all do that pray cursorily and never regard what cometh of it; like foolish boys that knock at a door in wantonness, but have no business, and therefore will not stay till somebody cometh to open the door. It is a great sin to take God's name in vain in any act of worship, much more in prayer. Now all do so that go about this duty as a task, not as a means to do their souls good, or to obtain blessings from God; when I hear merely that I may hear, or receive the Lord's supper, and rest in the act of receiving. Every ordinance must be gone about in faith and obedience, expecting the ends of the duty, as well as being employed in the acts of it. If you do it in good earnest, and with respect to God's institution, you must do so. All the ordinances come under a fourfold notion—as duties, as privileges, as means, as talents. As duties enjoined, and a part of our homage and obedience to God; this will breed an awe upon our conscience, to keep us to a due and constant observance of them; it is not a matter arbitrary, but our necessary duty. As privileges; this keepeth us from weariness, that we may not consider them as a burdensome task. As means of our growth and improvement, that notion is necessary that we may not rest in the work wrought, but look after the grace dispensed thereby. As talents for which we must give an account, which will quicken us to more earnest diligence in the improvement. Some do not look upon them as duties, and so neglect them; others not as privileges, and so do not prize them, are not joyful in the house of prayer; others not as means, and so rest in the bare performance, without looking after the fruits to be had thereby; others not as talents, and so are more indifferent whether they get good by them, yea or no: but when all these are regarded, we act best in any service or ordinance. Now, as this is true of ordinances in general, so especially of prayer, which is a sweet means of communion with God, not to be done as a task; herein we make an immediate address to God and come to set him a-work, and to take proof of his power and goodness, to see what he will do for his people. We put it, I say, to the trial, as in that ex-

traordinary case Elijah puts his contest with Baal's priests upon this issue, 'that God that should answer by fire, he should be God,' 1 Kings xviii. 24; so ordinarily we put in prayer to trial whether God hath any respect to his people, and that with God's own leave and encouragement; for he hath said that none shall seek his face in vain, Isa. xlv. 19. We put it to proof whether he will keep touch with his people, and be able and willing to perform what he hath promised. Therefore we use this duty in vain, and in a cursory way, if we be not earnest for an answer; which the saints dare not do.

Reason 2. Not looking for an answer proceedeth from an ill cause.

1. Heedlessness, not considering what they do, and then their prayers are the sacrifice of fools, Eccles. v. 1, 2. Surely attention to holy duties, and that we should consider what we are about, it is the most serious and important part of our lives. Now men that do not consider why they pray are heedless and inattentive and rash.

2. Atheism, there is a touch of it in this sin: Heb. xi. 6, 'He that cometh unto God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' God's being and his bounty, that there is a God, and that he will be good to them that seek him; these they do not believe steadfastly, these primitive and supreme truths of God's being and bounty, essence, and providence, but only comply with the common custom and fashion; for were they persuaded that there is a God, and that he is good to mankind, and will reward those that worship him sincerely, they would see what cometh of their duties and prayers to him.

3. Distrust, which is next akin to atheism: Job xxi. 15, 'What profit have we if we pray unto him?' Mal. iii. 14, 'Ye have said, It is in vain to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances?' &c. Now when you look for nothing, we do in effect say so; for you carry it as if nothing would come of your prayers and fasts. They that are persuaded that God heareth them, they will wait for the answer of their prayers: 1 John v. 14, 15, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.' But low and slight thoughts of God and his service beget this carelessness; something they do, but never look after what they do.

4. It argues some disesteem of God's favour and acceptance, they care not whether he hath any respect for them, yea or no; for they do not so much as inquire of it. Oh! how contrary is this to the temper of God's people! If God hide his face they are troubled, Ps. xxx. 7; he is the life of their lives: 'Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us,' Ps. iv. 7. The seasoning of their comforts is God's accepting their works, Eccles. ix. 7. How passionately do they beg for a glimpse, for a token for good, Ps. lxxxvi. 17. Nothing goeth so near their hearts as when the Lord hideth himself from their prayers: Ps. xxii. 2, 'I cry in the daytime, and thou hearest not; in the night season, and am not silent;' Job xxx. 20, 'I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me; I stand up, and thou regardest me not.' A dumb oracle is a great trouble. They make a business of prayer, therefore it is very grievous to have no answer, not to see

their signus, to have no token for good. The church taketh it bitterly to heart: Lam. iii. 14, 'Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayers should not pass through.' That cloud is his wrath, by reason of sin. Now, to have no affection this way argueth a stupid, sottish spirit. These are two reasons of the point.

Reason 3. If we do not look after God's answer, our loss is exceeding great.

1. We lose our labour in prayer, yea, return worse than we came, with more hardness of heart and neglect of God. Yea, that is not all, the loss of a prayer with a degree of spiritual judgment; but we lose confirmation of faith, for answers of prayer are notable props to the soul to support our faith in the truth of God's being: Ps. lxxv. 2, 'O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.' Every one shall own thee for God. So many answers of prayer, so many arguments against natural atheism. We have challenged him upon his word, and find there is a God. So of the truth of the promises, Ps. xlviii. 30. Thy word is a tried word; I will build upon it another time. You have put them in suit, and ever found them good. Now all these experiences are lost if we do not look for an answer of our prayers.

2. You lose excitements to love and obedience. Nothing so much increaseth our love to God, as when we see that he is mindful of us upon all occasions, especially in our deep necessities, Ps. cxvi. 1, 'I will love the Lord because he hath heard the voice of my supplication.' Every experience in this kind is a new fuel laid on to increase the fire.

3. We lose encouragements to pray again: Ps. cxvi. 2, 'Because he hath inclined his ear to me, I will call upon him so long as I live.' The throne of grace shall not be neglected and unfrequented by me: I see there is mercy to be had, help to be had. One adventure succeeding encourageth another: Ps. xxxii. 6, 'For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee;' because David found such ready audience and despatch.

4. You lose the benefit of sensible communion with God. Taking communion for familiarity, it lieth in donatives and duties, prayers and blessings; and there is a commerce between the heavens and the earth, by vapours and showers: prayers go up, and blessings come down; as it was told Cornelius, Acts x. 4, 'Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God;' and down come the blessings upon us.

5. God loseth honour and praise and thanksgiving if we do not look for an answer. For the answer, as it is matter of comfort to us, so it should be matter of praise to God: Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me;' so Col. iv. 2, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.' We are to gather up matter of praise to God. We should not be so barren in gratulation if we did observe more of these experiences. You would not only be glorifying God by way of invocation, but commemoration: you may commend him to others from your own experience: Ps. xxxiv. 8, 'O taste and see that the Lord is good.'

Use 1. To reprove them that throw away their prayers, and never look after them; that play with such a duty as this, as children that shoot away their arrows, and never look where they light. Surely this

argueth great contempt and low thoughts of God, formality in prayer, and stupidity of heart. It bespeaks low thoughts of God and of his providence; for if they did believe such a particular providence reacheth to all persons and things, they would study to produce some of these experiences, to be able to say, I was in such a strait, and God delivered me: Ps. xxxiv, 6, 'This poor man cried unto the Lord, and he heard him.' Great formality in prayer; for if we pray not out of course, but in good earnest, we cannot but hearken after the speeding of our requests. Great stupidity of spirit; hearts that have any sense of life in them are observing God's dealings, and suit their carriage accordingly. Lively Christians are putting cases.

Use 2. To press us to hearken after the answer of our prayers. God's children do so, and get much comfort thereby, and evidence of his love: Ps. lxi. 18, 19, 'But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my cry.' It is no small favour and respect we have from God's love to us; it is a great owning of our persons; our mercies are the sweeter. There is a double lustre and beauty put upon them when they come in the way of prayer, out of the hand of God; not by a common providence, but by covenant; and by virtue of the covenant put in suit by us, as well as granted by God, which is a pledge of God's respect to us. To this end—

1. Be persuaded that God will hear you, and answer you when you pray according to his will: 1 John v. 14, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.' This is absolutely necessary for all that will pray aright, and mind what they do; for none can come to God aright but those that are persuaded they shall be the better for coming to him: James i. 5, 'Pray in faith, nothing wavering.' There must be a relying upon God, if indeed we pray to him. He that expects little in prayer will neither be much in it nor serious about the answer of it.

2. This answer must be heedfully observed. Careless spirits will not easily discern it: Ps. cxxx. 5, 6, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning;' as those that watched in the temple for the dawning of the day. This earnest waiting is a happy token; when we make much of prayers, they are not lost. Therefore, as they watched for the word, brethren, so must you wait upon God for some discovery of his love by a gracious answer and return unto your prayers.

3. Sometimes God giveth an answer presently; sometimes it may be after some competent space of time. (1.) Sometimes presently; as Cornelius, in the time of prayer, and while the duty is a-doing. God giveth in some tokens of acceptance; as an angel was sent to Cornelius at the ninth hour, which was the hour of prayer, to assure him that his prayers were heard, and duties accepted: Acts x. 3, 'Peter and John went up to pray at the ninth hour,' Acts iii. 1. So Daniel: 'Whilst I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin; yea, whilst I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel was caused to fly swiftly.' The Lord is ready to answer the prayers of his servants in the very instant of their praying. So Acts iv. 3, 'While they prayed, they were filled with the Holy Ghost.' The cases brought are singular

and extraordinary as to the token and manner of assistance, but as to the substance of the blessing, it is the common practice of God's free grace: Isa. lviii. 10, 'When they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear;' Acts xii. 12, a company was met together in prayer when Peter in prison heard of the time of his deliverance. (2.) Sometimes a good while after: the prayers are in God's book, Mal. iii. 16. Now these must be waited for: 'My God will hear me,' Micah vii. 7. We cannot say, As soon as the prayer is made, for he saith, 'I will wait for the God of my salvation.' Paul prayed thrice for the removal of the messenger of Satan, 2 Cor. xii.; then God said, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' We must knock again and again. God heareth as soon as the prayer is made, but he taketh his own time to despatch an answer. Abraham prayeth for a child, but many years pass over till he hath him in his arms.

4. When God giveth an answer, own it as an answer. Sometimes we will not take notice of what is before our eyes, out of deep distress of spirit. It is said, Job ix. 16, 'Though I had called and he had answered, yet would I not believe that he had hearkened to my voice.' Thus we misinterpret God's dealings in our troubles, that we will not own God's work as an answer.

5. Consider the several ways how God giveth answer to his people's prayers.

[1.] Extraordinarily, as in ancient time; so an angel was sent to Cornelius to tell him his prayers were heard; so to Daniel; so to Abel, Heb. xi. 4, probably by fire from heaven; by vision to Abraham; by voice or visible token to Moses, and the high priest in the tabernacle of the congregation from above the mercy-seat. But these returns were proper to those times.

[2.] Ordinary, and this several ways:—

(1.) Either by granting the mercy prayed for; as to Hannah: 1 Sam. i. 27, 'For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me the petition I asked of him.' So to David: Ps. xxi. 2, 'Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips.' So often to his people, when they have humbly sought to him. Sometimes instantaneous, at the very praying: 1 Sam. vii. 9, 10, 'And Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him, and as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel, and the Lord discomfited the Philistines.' Or by degrees, when God is preparing instruments, before he giveth consummate deliverance: Acts vii. 34, 'I have heard their groanings, and I will send thee into Egypt.' Their escape was some while after.

(2.) By giving in spiritual manifestations to the soul, though he doth not give the particular mercy prayed for; as when upon the prayer he reviveth the soul of him that prayeth: Job xxxiii. 26, 'He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable to him, and he shall see his face with joy.' The Lord giveth them the light of his countenance, and special discoveries of his love or support till the mercy come: Ps. cxxxviii. 3, 'In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.' Support is an answer; such an answer had Paul: 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' Or when the heart is quieted; though we do not know what God will

do with our requests, yet satisfied in the discharge of our duty, and that we have commended the matter to God. So it is said of Hannah, 'When she had prayed, her countenance was no more sad,' 1 Sam. i. 18; and Phil. iv. 6, 7, 'Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Jesus Christ.' Sometimes by a secret impression of confidence, or a strong inclination to hope well of the thing prayed for: Ps. vi. 8, 'The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.' Or experiences; as they that travelled to Jerusalem, passing through the valley Baca, they met with a well by the way, Ps. lxxxiv. 6; a sweet refreshing thought, or some help in the spiritual life, by serious dealing with God; some consideration to set you a-work, or some new engagement of the soul to God, as the recompense of the duty; some principles of faith drawn forth in the view of conscience, not showed before. Some truth or other presented with fresh life and vigour upon the heart.

(3.) Sometimes by way of commutation and exchange; and so God doth answer the prayer, though he doth not give the mercy prayed for, when he giveth another thing that is as good, or better for the party that prayeth; though not in kind the same, yet in worth and value as good. This commutation may be three ways—(1.) In regard of the person praying. David fasts, and humbleth and melteth his soul for his persecutors, Ps. xxxv. 13, 'And it returned into his own bosom,' was converted to his own benefit. His fasting had no effect upon them, but his charity did not lose its reward. David prayeth for his first child by Bathsheba, but that child dieth, and God giveth Solomon instead thereof, 2 Sam. xii. 15. Noah, Daniel, Job shall save their own souls, Ezek. xiv. 14. Your peace shall return to you again, Luke x. 5, 6; the comfort of discharging their duty. (2.) In regard of the matter, carnal things are begged, and spiritual things are given: Acts i. 6, 7, 'The apostles asked him, Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' They did not receive the kingdom to Israel, but received the promise of the Spirit. Moses would fain enter into Canaan with the people: Deut. iii. 23, 24, 'And God said, Let it suffice thee; speak no more of this matter;' but God gave him a Pisgah sight, and ease of the trouble of wars. We would have speedy riddance of trouble, but God thinketh not fit; as showers that come by drops soak into the earth better than those that come in a tempest and hurricane. We ask for ease in troubles, and God will give courage under troubles: Lam. iii. 55–57, 'I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon: thou hast heard my voice; hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry: thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee; thou saidst, Fear not.' His gracious and powerful presence in trouble was enough. Christ 'was heard in that he feared,' Heb. v. 7; not saved from that hour, but supported and strengthened in it. Job sacrificed, prayed for his children when they were feasting, Job i. 5; and though they were all destroyed, God gave him patience, ver. 22; for in all that befell him 'he sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.' (3.) In regard of means. We pray such means may not miscarry; God will use others. As Abraham would

fain have Ishmael the child of the promise, but God intended Isaac : Gen. xvii. 18, ' O that Ishmael might live before thee ! ' Thus doth God often blast instruments we most expect good from, and make use of others to be instruments for our good which we did least expect it from. God may give us our will in anger, when the mercy turneth to our hurt. Therefore the kind of God's answer must be referred to his own will, in all things for which we are not to pray absolutely ; and when we have discharged our duty, endeavoured to approve our hearts to God, take what answer he will give.

Doct. From the manner of praying, with the whole heart, the saints have the more confidence of being heard in prayer. David allegeth his crying with the whole heart as a hopeful intimation of a gracious answer.

1. Because a prayer rightly made hath the assurance of a promise. The promise is, John xvi. 24, ' Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.' Now this beareth no exception, but that we ask according to his will, 1 John v. 14. *Si bona petant, boni, bene, ad bonum.* Good men, asking good things, in the name of Christ, for a good end, thou canst not miss.

2. Where there is sincerity and fervency, we have two witnesses to establish our comfort and hope—the Spirit of God, that knoweth the deep things of God ; and the spirit of man, that knoweth the things of man. God's Spirit, who stirreth up these groans in us : Rom. viii. 26, 27, ' He that searcheth the heart knoweth the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.' And the testimony of our own spirits, that we have done our part and discharged our duty, and so have true joy and confidence : Job xvi. 19, 20, ' My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high : my friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears to God.'

3. God doth not use to send them away comfortless that call upon him in spirit and in truth, because by one grace he maketh way for another ; by the grace of assistance for the grace of acceptance : Ps. x. 17, ' Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble ; thou hast prepared their heart ; thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.' Where God hath given a heart to speak, he will afford an ear to hear ; for God will not lose his own work : he cannot refuse those requests which are according to the direction of his word and the motions of his Holy Spirit, when they are brought to him.

Use. This exhorteth us to look more after the manner of praying. An earnest and sincere prayer cannot miscarry ; judge by this and you cannot want success. You cannot judge of your prayers by the wit, by the length, by the kind of words ; but by the faith, the sincerity, the obedience, the holy desires expressed in them. Cry with your whole hearts, and God will hear you. (1.) Look to the fervency of the prayer ; set yourselves in good earnest to seek God, and good will come of it : Dan. ix. 3, ' I set my face to seek the Lord God by prayer and supplications.' I seriously minded the work : 2 Sam. vii. 27, ' Thy servant hath found in his heart to make this prayer unto thee ;' he found his heart disposed to call upon God. There is many a prayer we force upon ourselves, we do not find it there. What encouragements from the word, what motions from the Spirit ?

Resolve to seek after it till you have found it: Ps. xxvii. 2, 'When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' Wrestle with God: Hosea xii. 3, 'He had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept and made supplication unto him.' Such as wrestle with God, and have their hearts broken and melted before the Lord, will prevail. (2.) Look to the sincerity of your prayers; see that you do not feign and pretend to pray for a thing you desire not. Is your confidence wholly in the Lord? When your heart is divided, and you hanker after carnal lusts, you cannot pray aright. (3.) Look that you ask more for his glory than for your own ease: James iv. 3, 'Ye ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, to consume it on your lust.' The less by-ends in prayer, the more hope of success.

Thirdly, The promise of duty, 'I will keep thy statutes.'

Doct. God's children, when they think of mercy, are at the same time thinking of duty and obedience.

1. Because they are ingenuous and thankful. Now obedience is the best expression of gratitude: and therefore, when they ask mercy, they mingle resolutions of duty with expectations of mercy: Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.'

2. They are supernaturally or spiritually sincere, and so propose this as their scope in all conditions, to live unto God: all their desires and resolutions are to this purpose. They have a sense of their own benefit, but still in subordination; their purpose is to serve him diligently: Phil. i. 21, 'To me to live is Christ;' Rom. xiv. 7, 8, 'For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth unto himself: for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live or die, therefore, we are the Lord's.'

3. This is God's end in giving mercy, temporal or spiritual, to bring them to obedience: Luke i. 74, 75, 'That we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.' Save me, quicken me, and I will keep thy statutes. God's end in giving, and the end of gracious souls in seeking mercies and blessings, is much the same—that God may have the glory, as well as they the benefit and comfort of what he bestows upon them.

Use. Mind your service more; engage yourselves to God anew, in every prayer: upon every mercy and answer of prayer: Lord, I desire this only in order to obedience.

SERMON CLXIV.

I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.—

VER. 146.

THIS verse is the same with the former, only these differences may be observed:—

1. There the qualification of the prayer is expressed, 'I cried with my whole heart.' Here the person to whom he prayed, 'I cried to thee, O Lord.' He had told us before how he cried, now to whom he cried; to thee have I sought, and to thee only.

2. The request was general, that God would hear him; now particular, that he would deliver him; there it was 'hear me,' now 'save me.'

3. The notion which implieth the word of God is diversified; there 'statutes,' here 'testimonies.'

4. Our translation expresseth another difference; there it is, 'I will keep thy statutes,' as making it his vow and purpose; here, 'I shall keep thy testimonies,' as making it the effect and fruit of his deliverance; or, as it is in the marginal reading, 'that I may keep thy testimonies,' as making it his scope and aim.

In the words observe—

1. An intimation of prayer, *I cried unto thee.*

2. The matter of his prayer, *save me*, or deliver me out of trouble.

3. The end and scope of his prayer, not for the satisfaction of his natural desire, but that he might have a heart and opportunity to serve God, and obey his word: *that I may*, or then I shall, *keep thy testimonies.*

Observations from the text.

Doct. 1. We should not lightly give over our suits to God.

Here is a repetition of the same prayer: I cried, yea, again I cried, and a third time: ver. 147, 'I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried.' *Si ter pulsanti nemo respondet, abito*; we use to knock at a door thrice, and then depart. Our Lord Jesus, Mat. xxvi. 44, 'prayed the third time the same words, saying, Father, if it be possible, let this cup depart from me.' So the apostle Paul: 2 Cor. ii. 8, 'For this I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.' So 1 Kings xvii. 21, 'And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee let this child's soul come into him again.' This it seemeth was the time in which they expected an answer in weighty cases, and yet I will not confine it to that number, for we are to reiterate our petitions for one and the same thing, so often as occasion requireth, till it be granted.

Now the reasons are:—

1. Because the force of importunity is very great: the two parables evidence that, Luke xi. and Luke xviii.; if to obtain the Spirit, or right upon our enemies or oppressors. In both these parables there is a condescension to the suppositions of our unbelief; if we suppose God tenacious and hard-hearted, or if we suppose him regardless and mindless of the affairs of the church; or, to put it in milder terms, if we think nothing due to us: Luke xi. 8, 'If he will not rise and give him because he is his friend;' or if our condition be so hard that we think it is past all relief; whatever be our secret and misgiving thoughts, we ought always to pray, *καὶ μὴ ἐκκακεῖν*, not to be overcome with evil: Luke xviii. 1, 'He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;' for importunity is of great prevalence with God and men.

2. A deliverance is never so sweet, nor so thankfully improved, if it come at the first call.

[1.] It is not so sweet, *nolo nimis facilem*. We disdain things that come too easily, but that which costs us much pains and long crying is more prized. The reason is because delay and difficulty sharpen our desires, and the sharper our desire in the absence of a blessing, the greater gust and sweetness we find in it when it cometh at last. A sack that is stretched out is more capacious, and holdeth the more; so is the soul more widened by enlarged desires, to entertain the blessing, for always our delight is according to the proportion of our desires; as a hungry man, or one long kept from meat, relisheth his food better than another that hath it always at hand: Isa. xxv. 9, 'And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation.' We that know blessings more by the want than the worth of them, in waiting we are acquainted with the difficulties and inconveniences that attend the want of things, and so are more fitted to prize them than ever we should have been if we had not so long waited.

[2.] It is more thankfully improved; this follows upon the former, and may be further made good, because when we know the difficulty of getting a blessing, we will not easily part with it; as they that get an estate are usually more careful how they spend it than they that are born to one: therefore God holdeth his people long at prayer, to prepare and season their hearts, that when they have it, they may know better how to employ it for his glory and his own good. Questionless Hannah would never have devoted her child to God had she not continued so long without him, and prayed for him with such bitterness of heart; but that wrought on her: 1 Sam. i. 11, 'And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man-child; then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head.' Compare this with ver. 27, 28, 'For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him; therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent unto the Lord.' The same effect you may observe in any spiritual comfort you obtain for your souls, or any temporal mercy or comfort of the present life, which you get by prayer. If God had answered you at first, it had been reckoned among the ordinary effects of his goodness, and so passed by; but what is won by prayer is usually worn with thankfulness. You would not have been so sensible of the hand of providence, the graciousness of the answer, or your obligation to God, or indeed that it had been an answer of prayer at all.

3. Things often and earnestly asked of God come with the greater fulness of blessing when they come; and so, as one saith, God payeth them use¹ for forbearance; the mercy is the more ample, and so every prayer hath its reward. Christ denied the woman of Canaan long, but at length yieldeth up himself to her importunity: Mat. xv. 26,

¹ That is, interest.—Ed.

'O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee as thou wilt.' She lost nothing by the delay. Hannah was long without a child, but at length the child proved the more eminent; she gets both a child and a prophet too. Let God alone, and do you continue praying, and he will recompense you abundantly for all his delay. Peter was in prison, and the church made prayers without ceasing, Acts xii. 5, and God doth not only bring him out, but brings him out with a miracle, so that they were astonished, ver. 16. God delayed for a while, and seemed to refuse their prayers; but when Herod was just about to bring him forth to execution, God brought him forth to deliverance. Every prayer is upon the file, and contributeth to make the mercy the more complete; it remaineth day and night before the Lord: 1 Kings viii. 59, 'And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord, be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night, as a memorial;' Acts x. 4, 'Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.'

4. It argueth an ill spirit when we will not continue praying, though we have not presently that which we pray for. To be sure—

[1.] There is disobedience in it, for it is contrary to God's injunctions: Luke xviii. 1, 'Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.' We ought not to surcease our suits so: Eph. vi. 18, 'Praying always, and with all perseverance;' *always* relateth to the constant exercise of this duty upon all occasions; *with all perseverance*, to particular suits we put up to God. Now our duty must not be omitted, whatever the discouragements be; as Moses was to hold up his hands till the going down of the sun, so are we to continue our suits, and press hard for an answer, till God give us the thing we pray for.

[2.] There is weakness of faith to yield to the temptation, and to go off upon every repulse; yea, sometimes too too plain unbelief and atheism, as if there were no mercy to be expected from God, or no good to be obtained by spiritual means. Faith is to believe what we see not. The woman of Canaan cometh to Christ; at first she gets not a word from him, and afterwards his speech is more discouraging than his silence; she is put out of the compass of his commission: 'I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;' but still she is importunate; afterwards a rough answer: 'It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it unto dogs.' She turneth his rebuke into an encouragement; then, 'O woman, great is thy faith,' Mat. xv. 26. Many times we pray for blessings, and the oracle is dumb and silent; though God love the supplicant, yet he will not seem to take notice of his desires: yea, the more they pray, the more they may go away with a sense of their unworthiness and revived guilt; yet the work of faith is to make an answer out of God's silence, a gracious answer out of his rebukes, and to increase our importunity the more.

[3.] Want of love to God, or coldness of love. It is the property of love to adhere to God, though we be not feasted with felt comforts and present benefits; yea, though he appear an enemy; for so will God try the affection and deportment of his children: Isa. xxvi. 8, 'Yea, in the way of thy judgments have we waited for thee; the desire of our souls is to thee, and to the remembrance of thy name;' Job xiii. 15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.' Not only

when our affections are bribed : a child of God should love God for his judgments, as well as fear him for his mercies ; as lime, the more water you sprinkle upon it, the more it burneth. It was a high expression of Bernard's affection to those that he took to be the people of God, *Adharebo vobis etiamsi velitis etiamsi nolitis* ; so should we adhere to God now. When you can only wait on him in the way of his mercies, not in the way of his judgments, your waiting and praying is discouraged upon every difficulty and disappointment, you have little love to him.

[4.] Want of patience, or tarrying God's leisure till the promise bring forth. Some are hot and hasty ; if God will appear presently they can be content to observe him ; but to be crying and crying till their throat be hoarse and weary of crying, and no good come on it, they cannot away with this : 2 Kings vi. 33, 'This evil is of the Lord ; why should I wait on the Lord any longer ?' They are discontented that God maketh them stay so long. Though God wait long upon them, and had reason enough to take the discouragement and be gone, yet they cannot tarry a little for God, and think prayer a useless work, unless it yield them a quick return, and that it is better to shift for themselves.

Use. Reproof to two sorts :—

1. To those that cease praying or crying to God, if they have not a present answer, especially if they meet with a contrary rebuke in the course of his providence. You must cry, and cry again, not imagine that God will be at your beck ; but foolish men suddenly conclude, Mal. iii. 14, 'It is in vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts ?' Oh no ! Consider something is due to the sovereignty of God, that we should wait his leisure ; for he is supreme, and will govern the world according to his own will, not ours. And therefore we must stay his time for the mercies we expect : Ps. cvi. 13, 14, 'They soon forgot his word, they waited not for his counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert.' And something is due to the stated course of his providence. We cannot expect that God should turn all things upside-down for our sakes, and invert the beautiful order of his dispensations : Job xviii. 4, 'Shall the earth be forsaken for thee, and the rock removed out of his place ?' shall God alter the course of nature, or change the order of governing the world for us, or to please our humour ? Something is due to the present estate of mankind, who are not to live by sense, but by faith : Hab. ii. 3, 4, 'For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie : though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up, is not upright in him : but the just shall live by his faith.' And that appointed time is for our trial, to see if we out of duty and principles of faith, can keep up our respects unto God, though his providence doth not presently gratify our desires or satisfy our necessities. Besides, it concerneth us to suspect ourselves rather than to blemish God's dispensations. Those always complain most of God's not hearing prayer who least deserve to be heard : Isa. lviii. 3-5, 'Wherefore

have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exact all your labour: behold, you fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness, ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?’

2. That though they do not cease praying, yet do they not pray with any life and hope, because of his delays and seeming denials. There are certain general blessings which we are always praying for, because though we have them, yet we ought daily to ask them of God; the continuance of them, the sense of them, the increase of them; here never cease praying. There are other particular blessings, that either concern ourselves, or the church of God, which we are to ask with earnestness, and yet submission: in these we put it to the most sensible trial whether God will hear us or no. Now for these things we must seek the face of God with hope and zeal.

[1.] Because it is not enough to keep up the duty, unless we keep up the affections that must accompany the duty: Rom. xii. 12, ‘Continuing instant in prayer,’ *προσκαρτεροῦντες*. In long afflictions men will pray, but they pray as men out of heart, for fashion’s sake, or with little and weak affection; rather satisfying their consciences than setting a-work the power of God.

[2.] A seeming repulse or denial should make us more vehement; as blind Bartimeus, ‘the more they rebuked him, he cried so much the more,’ Mark x. 48. God suffereth the faith of his servants to be tried with great discouragements; but the more it is opposed, the more should it grow, and the more powerfully and effectually should it work in our hearts; as the palm-tree shooteth up the faster the more weight is hung upon it; or as fire, the more it is pent up, the more it striveth to break out; therefore we should not only have fresh affections at first, but in every new prayer we should act over our faith again, and put forth spiritual desires anew.

[3.] God’s dearest children are not admitted at the first knock: Mat. vii. 7, ‘Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.’ It may be we have not at first asking; we need seek and knock. Mercy doth not come to us all in haste; we have not at first what we lack; delays are no denials; therefore we must not take the first or second answer, but continue with instance: ‘Give the Lord no rest,’ Isa. lxii. 7. Be importunate with him, to hasten the deliverance of his people.

[4.] We must not only continue praying when Christ seemeth to neglect us, or to give no answer, but when he giveth a contrary answer; when he, to appearance, rejecteth our persons and prayers, and seemeth to forbid us to pray. Sometimes he seemeth to neglect us, and pass us by as if he took no notice; but yet he heareth when he doth not answer; yea, his not answering is an answer. Pray, or continue your prayer. It is said, Mark vi. 48, ‘He saw them toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary to them; and about the fourth watch of the

night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.' But he came with an intent to appease the storm and help them. Christ taketh notice of the distresses of his people, but they shall not know so much, but delayeth to help till all their patience be spent, and yet then seemeth to pass by, for their thorough trial and exercise, and to move them more earnestly to pray. Sometimes he giveth them a seeming contrary answer and rebuke; instead of an expression of favour, he seemeth to pursue us in anger. God is the main party against us, we have to do with an offended God; but yet we should not quit him, but follow him when he seemeth to forsake us, and fly to him when he is pursuing us in hot displeasure. Such is the admirable power of faith that it dares call on an angry God, and follow him when he goeth away from us, and lay hold on him when he smiteth, and cast itself into his arms in the midst of his rebukes and frowns: Jonah ii. 4, 'Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet will I look again towards thy holy temple.' God seemeth to cast us off, as those he will not favour or care for, which is a great trouble to a child of God, who liveth by his favour, and valueth that above all things else: now for such a one to be rejected by God in his own sense and feeling, it goeth near his heart; yet in such a case we should not cast away our confidence, nor give over all addresses to God, but yet look to him and wait upon him.

[5.] Whether God answereth or no, it is the duty of faith to answer itself. The answer of his providence is not so sure as the answer of his word, and that faith hath to do with. See Ps. vi. 4, 'Return, O Lord; deliver my soul; save me, for thy mercies' sake.' Compare ver. 8, 9, 'The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping: the Lord hath heard the voice of my supplications; the Lord will receive my prayer.' When trembling for fear of wrath, yet in prayer his heart groweth confident as if it had received news of an answer from heaven: Ps. lv. 2, 'Attend unto me, and hear me;' compared with ver. 19, 'My God shall hear, and afflict them.' He is confident of it that the prayer should not miscarry. So Ps. liii. 1, 2, 'Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God; defend me from them that rise up against me; deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men;' ver. 10, 'The God of my mercy shall prevent me; God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies.' Faith sees its own deliverance in the promise and all-sufficiency of God. When we have prayed according to God's will, we should take our prayer for granted, and leave it lying at God's feet: 1 John v. 14, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.' God's delay is not always an argument of his hatred, but some more glorious purpose which is to be helped on by prayer: John xi. 5, 6, 'When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.'

I observe again, that he not only repeateth his prayer, but reneweth the promise of obedience, to show that it was no vanishing notion, but a settled conclusion; as Christ maketh Peter profess his love thrice to engage him the more, John xxi. So David, 'I will keep thy statutes;' and again, 'I will keep thy testimonies;' as if he had said, Indeed Lord, I will; it is the settled purpose of my heart

to return to thee in the sincere obedience of my whole life. The note is—

Doct. That purposes and promises of obedience should not be slightly made, but with the greatest advertency and seriousness of mind.

1. Because we are usually too slight in devoting ourselves to God : Deut. v. 27–29, ‘Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say ; and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee, and we will hear it, and do it. And the Lord heard the voice of your words when you spake unto me, and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee ; they have well said, all that they have spoken. Oh, that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever.’ The Israelites again, when Joshua puts them to the question whether they would serve the Lord or other gods, Joshua xxiv. 18, 19, ‘We will serve the Lord, for he is our God. Joshua said unto them. Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is an holy God.’ What is the reason men are so slight ? Partly because they measure their strength by the present pang of devotion that is upon them, not considering the latent principle of sin, and that proneness to transgress that is in their hearts. Partly they take up duty by the lump, and the general bulk and view of it, without sitting down and counting the charges, as Christ advises, Luke xiv. ; whether they can be content to bear difficulties, renounce lusts, crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof. A foolish builder doth not think of storms, Mat. vii. ; if his building stand for the present, he is satisfied. Partly because men will promise God fair to be rid of the present anguish and troubles, yield to anything to be out of the present danger ; but when they are out, they seldom regard the vows of their distress ; as those, Ps. lxxviii. 34–37, made great promises, ‘but their heart was not right with God, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.’ Partly too when they are out of a temptation, and lusts are not stirring, they are other men than when in temptation, and so think all will be easy.

2. Because the nature of the work calleth for advertency and seriousness, because it is a work of the greatest moment, and so must be done with the greatest deliberation. This devoting ourselves to God both entitleth us to all the comforts of Christianity, and engageth us to all the duties of it. It entitleth us to all the comforts ; you enter yourselves heirs to the covenant of grace when you enter into the bond of the holy oath, or give your hand to the Lord to be his people : 1 Cor. iii. 22, ‘All things are yours, because you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.’ If you have owned Christ as your dearest Saviour and sovereign Lord, with love, thankfulness, and subjection, and given him the supreme command of your souls, then you are Christ’s, and God is yours, and all things yours : glory and salvation shall be yours in the world to come ; grace, help, maintenance, ordinances, and providences shall be yours in the present world ; and death, as the connection between the two worlds, as the passage out of the one into the other, shall be yours also. It is also the beginning and foundation of all obedience, and if this were once seriously and heartily done, other things would succeed the more easily. He that is indeed God’s will

use himself for God's glory and service, and God shall have a share in all that he hath and doth : Rom. xiv. 7, 8, 'None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.' They came off so freely : 2 Cor. viii. 5, 'And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.' This enliveneth our whole work. It is no hard matter to persuade them that have given up themselves to God to part with anything for God's use.

3. Because of the danger both in regard of sin and judgment, if we do it not aright.

[1.] In regard of sin, rash and sudden engagements are seldom sound : Mat. xiii. 20, 21, the stony ground received the word with joy, and forthwith the good seed sprang up, but the blade soon withered. Usually sudden undertakings are accompanied with faint and feeble prosecutions; and though men are warm and passionate for the present, within a while it cometh to nothing; all their promises are broken, as tow is burnt in the fire.

[2.] In regard of judgment, every consecration implieth an execration. If you break with God after you have engaged yourselves to him, your condition is worse; it aggravateth every deliberate sin, and hastens judgment, for God will avenge the quarrel of his covenant, Lev. xxvi. 25. Better never begin, or the word pass out of your mouths, or thought enter into your heart, unless you be sincere, mean as you say. It is dangerous to alienate things once consecrated; this is the worst kind of sacrilege, that shall not go unpunished.

Use. You see, then, what seriousness we should use in devoting ourselves to God, or promising obedience to him.

1. Remember the weakness of a creature, that you may resolve in God's strength.

2. Consider incident temptations, whether anything be like to shake you in your covenanted course, that you may arm yourselves against it.

3. Consider your more particular affections; where the business is like to stick most, there are tender parts.

4. Consider the weight and importance of subjection. He will not be content with a little religiousness by the by, but you must love him with all your heart and all your soul, and serve him with all your might.

5. Consider the strength of your resolution, that you be irrevocably, everlastingly put under the sovereignty and command of God. Thus do, and you will find success and comfort in your deed.

Now to the words themselves. There is first an intimation of a prayer; where—

1. The vehemency, *I cried.*

2. The object or person to whom, *to thee.*

'I cried.' David keepeth up his fervour. What crying in prayer is I have showed in the former verse. I shall observe now—

Doct. That great trouble and sense of danger puts an edge upon prayer, and kindleth our affection in it.

When Israel was under sore bondage, God saith, Exod. iii. 6 'I have seen the affliction of my people in Egypt, and have heard their

cry.' Afflictions make us cry in prayer, not only speak. An ordinary affection is *vox orationis*; it speaketh to God in prayer; but a vehement affection is *clamor orationis*, the cry of prayer. Ordinary prayers speak to God, but earnest prayers cry to God; and though remiss and cold wishes vanish in the air, yet strong cries pierce the heavens. They have a shrill accent, and cannot be kept out from God: Judges iv. 3, 'The children of Israel cried unto the Lord; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron.' So Judges vi. 5-7, 'They cried to the Lord because of the Midianites, who came up as grasshoppers.' David: Ps. xviii. 6, 'In my distress I called to the Lord, and cried to my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.' He prayed not seldom, but often and frequently; not slackly, but with fervency and earnestness.

1. Affliction will teach men to pray that never prayed before. The rude mariners in a storm called every man upon his god: *Qui nescit orare, discat navigare*, Jonah i. 5. Those that neglect God at other times, as if they had no need of him, or pray faintly, are then glad to seek to him for succour and safety: Ps. lxxiii. 34, 'When he slew them, then they sought him, and inquired early after God.' The natural principle of fear of death and love of self-preservation puts them upon it. So Jer. ii. 27, 'In their affliction they will say, Arise and save us;' Judges x. 10, 'And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, saying, We have sinned against thee;' and ver. 14, 'Go, and cry unto the gods that ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.'

2. Good ones that prayed before will pray better and oftener, and with greater seriousness. Therefore God puts his own in straits to quicken their affections: Isa. xxvi. 16, 'Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer, when thy chastening was upon them.' So Hosea v. 15, 'I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face, in their affliction they will seek me early.' When we are pressed hard on all sides, then the throne of grace is more frequented; we are driven to it. Joab would not come at Absalom's call till he set his barley-field on fire.

Use 1. Be content to be cast into such an estate that you may learn to pray; for, alas! we are but cursory at other times, but then our necessities whip us to the throne of grace, that was set up for a time of need; then is a time to put promises in suit, to make use of our interest in God. We mis-expound the voice of God's providence; we expound trouble to be his casting off, putting us from him; they are his voice calling, his hand pulling us to him: it is a time of drawing nigh we are allowed: Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in a day of trouble.' The day of trouble is the fruit of sin, a part of the old curse. When we think him, feel him an enemy, he is drawing us nearer to him. Blessed season to bring God and you together, when our troubles chase us to the throne of grace. God is not wholly gone, he hath left somewhat behind him to draw us to himself.

Use 2. It reproveth them that neglect God in their troubles: Dan. ix. 13, 'All this is come upon us, yet we have not made our prayer unto thee.' You defer the dispensation; now you should make up your former negligence. Unprofitableness under the rod is an ill

presage, when God sends a tempest after us. Oh, how frequent and earnest should we be in the practice of this duty!

1. This is a time proper for it. Prayer is a duty never out of season, though some seasons are proper and solemn to it. God is always to be prayed unto, Job xxvii. 11. When freed from trouble and inconvenience we are not freed from prayer; still we must profess dependence, subjection, and maintain our communion. But this is a special season: James v. 13, 'Is any one afflicted? let him pray.'

2. Though afflictions drive us to the throne of grace, yet if we come seriously and heartily, we are not unwelcome to him. Those very prayers which necessity doth extort from us are accepted by God, and valued by him as an acceptable piece of worship. Therefore such as look toward God ought not to be discouraged though afflictions drive them to it, though they sought him not before, or not in good earnest before; provided that always they find other errands, and be careful to maintain a constant communion with him. Most that are acquainted with God are taken in the briars. Jesus Christ in the days of his flesh had never heard of many, if their necessities had not brought them to him—their palsies, and possessions, and fevers, deafness, dumbness; thanks to these as their awakening occasions. A man will say, You come to me in your necessity. God is willing to receive us upon any terms.

3. How desperate in appearance soever our condition seem to be, yet crying will bring relief, or help may be found in God for them that cry to him: Judges iii. 9, 'When they cried, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz:' Judges iii. 15, 'And when the children of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera.' So Psalm cvii.; frequently.

From that *unto thee*.

Doct. In our troubles we must have recourse to God, and sue to him by prayer and supplication for help and deliverance in due time.

1. Because he is the author of our trouble. In miseries and afflictions our business lieth not with men, but God; by humble dealing with him we stop wrath at the fountain-head. He that bindeth us must loose us; he is at the upper end of causes, and whoever be the instruments of our trouble, and how malicious soever, God is the party with whom we are to make our peace; for he hath the absolute disposal of all creatures, and will have us to acknowledge the dominion of his providence, and our dependence upon him. In treaties of peace between two warring parties, the address is not made to private soldiers, but to their chief: 'The Lord hath taken away,' saith Job, chap. xxxiv. 29; 'when he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?'

2. He challengeth this prerogative to be the God of salvation: Ps. iii. 8, 'Salvation belongeth unto the Lord:' and therefore, if we would be saved, we must seek it of him. Others cannot help if he help not, for he hath all means and creatures and second causes at his command. If we lean to means, they may fail, but if we rely upon God, he will never fail. Therefore, whatever means God offereth for our help, prayer to God is the best means, and first to be used.

3. There is comfort in dealing with God, whatever our case be. (1.) Because of his all-sufficient power. (2.) Because of his good-will and readiness to help.

[1.] Because of his power and all-sufficiency, so that he hath ways of deliverance more than we know of, and can save his own when men do count their case desperate: Dan. iii. 29, 'There is no other God that can deliver after this sort.' Let the strait be never so great, the burden heavy, and the creature weak, and at a desperate loss, yet God can find out ways and means to do his people good.

[2.] For his good-will and readiness to hear: Ps. lxxv. 2, 'Oh, thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.' The readiness of God to hear prayer doth open a door of access to all people who are sensible of their burdens and necessities. He hath ever showed himself ready to hear the cries and groans of his people, and woe be to them against whom they cry: Ps. xxii. 5, 'They cried unto thee, and were delivered.' Their cries and groans are not hid from him, and cannot be shut out: Ps. cvi. 44, 'Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, and he heard their cry.'

Use. 1. To reprove divers sorts.

1. Some seek to help themselves by impatience, fretting, unquiet behaviour in their troubles; this doth increase their misery. Go, pour out your hearts before the Lord, that giveth ease: Phil. iv. 6, 7, 'Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus.' Your wrestling with trouble within yourselves doth but embroil you the more.

2. Some trust in outward helps, seek to men and means; as Asa to the physicians, not to the Lord, 2 Chron. xvi. 12. It is not unlawful to use means, but we must depend upon the Lord for the blessing. Seek to him first, otherwise looking to man proveth a snare many ways, as it tempts us to comply with their lusts, to neglect God, maketh way for the greater sorrow in disappointment. The creature is vain in itself, made more vain by our confidence: Ps. lx. 11, 'Give us help from trouble, for vain is the help of man.' You will be brought to it at last. The more earnestly we seek God, the more confidence we may have of the creature.

Use 2. To inform us of the privilege and duty of the godly.

1. Their privilege; they have a God to go to. The worldly man sigheth and crieth he knoweth not to whom; but the godly man presenteth himself in his lamentations to God: 'My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears unto God,' Job xvi. 20. He hath a Father in secret, a Friend in a corner; they need not go to men, nor to saints and angels; they have God himself, and can challenge him by his office, as the judge of the world, to help poor creatures: Ps. xciv. 2, 'Lift up thyself, thou judge of the world; render a reward to the proud.' Yea, by his peculiar relation to them: Ps. v. 2, 'Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my king and my God; for unto thee will I pray.' They do not cry unto him as a stranger, but one in covenant relation with them.

2. Their duty to make God their guardian and saviour in all their

distress, when in their own sense they are near perishing : Mark viii. 26, 'Arise, save us, we perish ;' 2 Kings xix. 19, 'Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save us out of his hand ; that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only.' When they have a good cause and a good conscience, this they may do and this they ought to do, and they will have comfort in it.

The last thing which I shall observe is—

Doct. That prayer for deliverance should be accompanied with serious purposes of obedience. 'Then,' saith David, 'I will keep thy testimonies.'

1. Because this is the best expression of gratitude and thankfulness. I take it for granted that every mercy from God deserveth a thankful return on the creature's part ; as we expect a return of our prayers, so God expecteth a return of his mercies ; and therefore we should be as careful to give him what he requireth, as we are careful to seek of him that which we need ; for even in our commerce with God there is *ratio dati et accepti*. I presume, again, that there is no such expression of thankfulness as obedience. Verbal thanks are but a cold return ; thanks-doing is the best thanksgiving : Ps. l. 23, 'He that offereth praise glorifieth me, and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God.' Yea, once more, that we should think of this aforehand ; while we are asking the mercy in our distress, we should engage ourselves to glorify God both in word and deed. Again, the time that we have our mercies for ; in affliction we consider and are more serious, and afterwards we should keep the conscience of our obligation.

2. It is a sign the rod hath done its work, and then it will be gone, when it hath convinced you of former failings, and put you upon serious purposes : Job xxxiv. 31, 32, 'Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will offend no more. That which I see not, teach thou me : if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.' Otherwise what we ask of temporal mercy is either denied us or we get it in wrath.

3. You have a true notion of deliverance ; you look upon it as an engaging mercy ; therefore if God alter your condition you are bound to serve him. The end of our great deliverance is service : Luke i. 74, 75, 'That he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.' All deliverances out of straits are branches and appendices of the great redemption of our souls unto eternal life, and have the same end and use : Ps. cv. 45, 'That they might observe his statutes and keep his laws.' That is the end of all deliverance out of trouble, to engage the hearts of his people to obedience, heart to serve him, opportunity to serve him.

4. A gracious heart desireth nothing to himself alone, and cannot be content to have the use of any benefit to himself only, but eyes God in all his enjoyments and all his requests ; therefore his great aim is that he may be in the better condition to keep God's commandments, for they 'live unto God ;' Rom. xiv. 7, 8, 'For none of us liveth unto himself, and no man dieth unto himself ; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord ; whether we

live therefore or die, we are the Lord's.' In every state they would be unto God what they are when they seek to be delivered; it is that they may be in the better condition and capacity to serve God, and have more opportunities to glorify his name.

Use. To persuade us to seek deliverance with these aims.

1. This is the temper of the people of God; that which urgeth to prayer is his glory; that which is their scope is his service. It is seen partly by the secret workings and purposes of their souls, what they do with their mercies when they have them; what they please themselves with in the supposition of obtaining them. What is it with? The satisfying of their revenge, providing for their families, living in pomp and ease, or that they may serve God? Ps. lxxv. 2, 'When I shall receive the congregation, I will judge uprightly;' if ever God give an opportunity again. And partly by the preparations; they are afraid of a treacherous heart, therefore fitting themselves to enjoy the mercy before they have it, as the apostle learned to abound, Phil. iv. 11, 12. Partly by the arguments they urge in prayer: Ps. lxxxviii. 10-12, 'Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave, or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark, and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?' So Ps. cvi. 47, 'Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise.' A true believer would have comfort, not for his own satisfaction, but to glorify God.

2. Then we are sure to speed when our end is right: James iv. 3, 'Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.' We may speak it with confidence, our prayers miscarry for want of a right end.

3. The equity of this; God hears us that we should hear him.

SERMON CLXV.

I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.—VER. 147.

DAVID still goeth on to give us an account of his fervour in prayer, 'I cried.' That which we have new in this verse is—

1. His vigilancy and diligence, *I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried.*

2. The reason and encouragement of this instant and assiduous praying, *I hoped in thy word.*

First, His vigilancy and diligence, 'I prevented,' &c. He rose betimes to meditate and pray; the Septuagint, *ἐν ἀωρίᾳ*. Hesychius defineth that time to be *ὥραν ἀπρακτον*, a time of no business; when others were sleeping David was praying. The word 'prevented' is emphatical. David lived as it were in a strife with time, being careful it should not overrun him; he pressed to get before it, by doing some good in it, and to get beforehand with the day.

Doct. Those that make a business of prayer will use great vigilancy and diligence therein.

I say, that make a business of prayer; others that use it as a compliment and customary formality will not be thus affected, or do it as a thing by the by, or a work that might well be spared, do not look upon it as a necessary duty; but if a man's heart be in it, he will be early at work, and follow it close morning and night. His business is to maintain communion with God; his desires will not let him sleep, and he gets up early to be calling upon God: Ps. lxxxviii. 13, 'But unto thee have I cried, O Lord, and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee.' Thus will good men even break their sleep to give themselves to prayer and calling upon the name of God. So Isa. xxvi. 9, 'With my soul have I desired thee in the night, and with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.' A man that hath an earnest desire after God, he will be at it night and day, when others are taking their rest. Their seeking of God is early and earnest; but where such strong desires are not, God is little minded and regarded; and of all businesses prayer seemeth that which may be best spared.

That I may fully commend David's practice to you, I shall observe in this his diligence:—

1. That it was a personal, closet, or secret prayer, 'I cried,' I alone, with thee in secret.

2. That it was an early morning prayer, 'I prevented the dawning of the morning.'

3. That it was a vehement and earnest prayer, for it is expressed by crying, which, as Chrysostom saith, noteth *οὐ τόνον τῆς φωνῆς ἀλλὰ τῆς διανοίας τὴν διάθεσιν*—Chrys. in Ps. v. He proveth it by that of God to Moses, 'Wherefore criest thou unto me?' Exod. xiv. 15. And when Moses was silent, yet he crieth; for crying noteth the affection of the mind, not extension of the voice. Where I shall note, that it was an earnest prayer, though private; and earnest, though as yet he could get no answer.

4. That it was the prayer of a public person, of a king, and a king entangled in wars, whose calling exposed him to a multitude of business and distractions; yet he had his times of converse with God. Take all this together, and the pattern will be more fit to be commended to your imitation.

First, It was a personal or secret prayer, 'I cried,' I alone, and without company. Our Saviour doth in Mat. xviii. 19, 20, encourage us to public prayer, by the blessed effect of such petitions, where two or three do agree to ask anything of God in the name of Christ. He doth suppose that his disciples will make conscience of personal and solitary prayer, and therefore giveth directions and encouragement about it: Mat. vi. 6, 'But when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which seeth in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret will reward thee openly.' He taketh it for granted that every one of his disciples is sufficiently convinced of being often with God in private, and pouring out his heart to God alone. It is not *if*, but *when*, as supposing they will be careful of this; it is not plurally and collectively, 'when ye pray,' but *ὅταν προσεύχη* 'when thou prayest.' Elsewhere the context speaketh

of public prayer, or the assemblies of saints and of family worship; but here he speaketh of personal prayer. Church prayer hath a special blessing, when with a combined force we besiege heaven; as the petition of a shire and county is more than a private man's supplication; but yet this is not without its blessing. God is with you in private. Pray to thy Father in secret, and he that seeth in secret observeth the carriage and posture and frame of thy spirit; all thy fervour and uprightness of heart is known to him. That which is the hypocrite's fear, that God seeth in secret, is the saint's comfort, that God seeth in secret: it bindeth condemnation upon the thoughts of wicked men, 1 John iii. 21, but is their support, John xxi. 17; Rom. viii. 17, 'He that searcheth the heart knoweth the mind of the spirit.' He knoweth the brokenness or unbrokenness of the heart; he can pick out the very language of thy sighs and groans, know where thou art, and how thou art employed: Acts ix. 11, 'Arise and go into the street which is called Strait, and inquire in the house of Judas for one Saul of Tarsus, for behold he prayeth.' In such a street, in such a house, in such a chamber of the house, there is one a-praying: a notable place to express God's seeing in secret, where we are, what we do, and how affected. And then his reward is another encouragement; he will reward thee openly, grant thee what thou prayest for, or bless thee for the conscionable performance of this duty. Openly, either by a sensible answer of thy prayers, as Dan. ix. 20-22; or with an evident blessing, as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the eyes of the world; God highly favoured them. A secret prayer hath an open blessing; or in convincing the consciences of men; Pharaoh sendeth for Moses and Aaron when in distress. The consciences of wicked men are convinced that God's praying children have special audience with him; no magicians sent for then, but Moses and Aaron. Thus God may reward them openly: 1 Sam. ii. 30, 'Those that honour me I will honour.' But chiefly at the day of judgment: Luke xiv. 14, 'He shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.' Then is the great reward of Christians, and most public: 'Then shall every man have praise of God,' 1 Cor. iv. 5. Thus you see how our Lord encourageth us to closet prayer. But let us see other arguments to engage us to this duty.

1. All the precepts of prayer do include closet prayer: 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving,' Col. iv. 2; 'Pray without ceasing,' 1 Thes. v. 17. First God's precepts fall upon single persons before it falleth upon families and churches; for God considereth us first as persons apart, and then in our several combinations and societies in joining with others. The duty is rather imposed upon us than taken up by voluntary choice; and that only at stated times, when they can conveniently meet. If we are to continue in prayer, and to pray without ceasing, we are to make conscience ourselves of being often with God. Every person that acknowledgeth a God, that hath a Father in heaven, must come and profess his dependence upon him.

2. The example of Christ, which beareth the force of a law in things moral. We read often of Christ's praying: Mark i. 35, 'He went out into a solitary place to pray;' and Mat. xiv. 23, and Luke vi. 12, we

read he prayed a whole night to God. Now let us improve this instance. Christ had no such need of prayer as we have; the God-head dwelt in him bodily; nor such need of retirement; his affections were always in frame; yet he went out from the company of his disciples to pray alone to God. This pattern is very engaging, for if we have the spirit of Christ, we will do as Christ did; and very encouraging, for by submitting to this duty he sanctifieth it for all: his steps drop fatness, and leave a blessing and virtue behind him. And it assureth us of his sympathising with us; he is acquainted with the heart of an earnest supplicant; and it is some comfort against our imperfections; when we are with God, and our hearts are as heavy as a log, it is a comfort to think of this particular part of his righteousness by which our defects are covered.

3. I shall urge it from God's end in pouring out the Spirit, that we may pray apart, and mourn apart over our distempers and personal necessities, Zech. xii. 10-14. Many will say they have no gifts; certainly they that feel their necessities will speak of them in one fashion or another. But this cuts off the objection. The Spirit is given to help thee: I will pour upon them the Spirit of grace and supplication, and they shall mourn apart. Such is God's condescension to the saints, that he hath provided for them not only an advocate but a notary; a notary to draw up their petitions, and an advocate to present them in court. And surely the gifts of the Spirit should not lie by idle and useless.

4. I might urge you too from the practice of the saints, who are called God's suppliants, Zeph. iii. 10; the generation that seek him, Ps. xxiv. 6. They delight in God's company, and cannot be content to stay away long from him. Daniel had his three times a day, Dan. vi. 10. So David: Ps. lv. 17, 'Evening and morning and noon will I pray and cry aloud, and he shall hear my voice.' And 'Seven times a day will I praise thee,' Ps. cxix. 164. And Cornelius prayed to God always, Acts x. 2; not only with his family, but sometimes alone for his family. They that have a habit of prayer will be thus affected. Now, to be altogether unlike the people of God giveth just cause of suspicion.

5. Shall I add our own private necessities, which cannot be so feelingly spoken to by others, do challenge such a duty at our hands, or it may be are not so fit to be divulged and communicated to them: 1 Kings viii. 38, 'There is the plague of our own hearts.' Paul had his thorn in the flesh: 1 Cor. xii. 7, 'I sought the Lord thrice.' No nurse like the mother; none so fit feelingly to lay forth our case to God as ourselves. Private prayer it is a help to enlargement of heart, for the more earnest men are, the more they desire to be alone: Jer. xiii. 17, 'My soul shall weep sore in secret places.' Christ went from his disciples in his agony, when he would pray more earnestly, Luke xxii. 41, 42. Strong affections are loath to be disturbed, and seek retirement. Jacob sent away his company when he wrestled with God, Gen. xxiii. 24. Oh! then, let all this be considered by you. If you neglect closet addresses to God, you wrong God and yourselves. You wrong God, because it is a necessary part of the creature's homage to God; and you wrong yourselves, because such duties bring

in a great deal of comfort and peace to the soul, and many sweet and gracious experiences, which are not vouchsafed elsewhere. Bernard saith, The church's spouse is bashful, and Christ will not communicate his loves in company. You are to use acquaintance with God, and so peace shall come to us, Job xxii. 21. It argueth little friendship to God when we seldom come at him, and maintain no personal commerce with him. When we pray with others, we cannot so well tell who is heard as when we pray alone, and see what God will do for our souls: Ps. cxvi. 1, 'I will love the Lord, because he hath heard the voice of my supplication.' You sought earnestly for such a thing, and the Lord heard you. To conclude all, a man will not pray with any savour and delight in public that doth not pray in secret. I observe in Ezekiel's vision the Lord removed from the temple by degrees; first from the holy place to the altar of burnt-offerings, then to the threshold of the house, then to the mountain on the east side of the city; there it stood hovering as loath to be gone. So first God is cast out of the closet, private intercourses are neglected, then out of the family, and then out of the congregation, and then public ordinances are laid aside as useless; then are men given up to a strange giddy and vertiginous spirit, and all manner of profaneness. As a tree dies by degrees, first bears no fruit, then no leaves, then no bark; so carnal Christians die by degrees.

Secondly, It was an early morning prayer, 'I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried.' I would not lay a burden upon any one's conscience; so God have his due at any time of the day, it is enough. In colder climates, those of a weaker constitution may not be able to rise so soon, and therefore if any other time of the day be fittest for commerce, all circumstances considered, it cometh to the same issue. Yet that the morning is our golden time, and should not be neglected out of sluggishness, whatever dispensation there be for weakness, these considerations may evince.

1. The example of Christ and his saints. We read of our Lord Jesus Christ, Mark i. 35, 'That in the morning, rising a great while before day, he went out and prayed.' This example bindeth those to receive it that can receive it. If you would take the opportunity of the morning, it deserves to be considered by us how willing Christ was to deny his natural rest to be with God in private. And have not we more need? And accordingly the saints have practised this: Ps. v. 3, 'My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct my prayer to thee, and look up.' Upon which Chrysostom saith, Before thou wastest thy hands, wash thy soul by prayer. So again, Ps. lix. 16, 'I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning.' So would David begin his day with praises of God and prayers to him. So 1 Sam. i. 19, 'And they rose up early, and worshipped before the Lord.' That was their first work, and they were betimes at it. So the primitive Christians had their *hymnos antelucanos*, they sung psalms to God and Christ in the morning early, as their persecutors informed against them. See Tertul. Apol. Euseb., &c. Now this is of some significance to Christians.

2. Because whenever we have strong affections to anything, we make it our morning work, be it good or bad. Good; so Mary and Mary

Magdalene came early to the sepulchre of Christ, Mat. xxviii. The disciples, when they came to wait for the promise of the Spirit, they met betimes, for the Holy Ghost fell upon them in the morning: Acts ii. 15, 'For these men are not drunk, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day,' which was about nine of the clock; and some good time had been spent before, as appears by this speech that was uttered. So Hosea v. 16, 'In their afflictions they will seek me early.' This is their first and chiefest work: that which urgeth the heart most, we shall think of in the morning. The objects that have made deepest impression upon our spirits will present themselves before any images be received from abroad: Prov. vi. 22, 'Bind my law upon thy heart; when thou walkest, it shall talk with thee,' &c. Abraham, when he went about the work of offering his son Isaac, he rose early in the morning, Gen. xxii. So, for bad things: if a man be worldly, his worldly desires and affections compel him to rise early for their satisfaction, Ps. cxxvii. 3, the drunkard is thinking early of his morning draught, to be filled with wine! Isa. xv. 11, 'Woe to them that rise up early to follow strong drink.' The people, when they were mad upon the calf, Exod. xxxvi. 6, 'They rose up early in the morning and offered burnt-offerings to it.' Whatsoever hath secured its interest in the soul will first urge us. So if prayer be our chief pleasure, it will urge us to be up betimes with God: our delights and affections solicit us in the morning.

3. It is the choicest time of the day, and therefore should be allotted to the most serious and necessary employment. It is the choicest time, partly with respect to the body, because the body is then best refreshed, and our vigour repaired, which is lessened and spent with the business of the day; our memories quickest, senses readiest, natural faculties most acute. And partly with respect to the mind; our morning thoughts are our virgin thoughts, more pure, sublime, and defecate, usually free from worldly cares, which would distract us in prayer, and will more encroach upon us by our worldly business, and the baser objects which the necessity of our life engages us to converse with, and be employed about. Certainly the best time should be taken up about the best business; not in recreations to be sure, for this is to knit pleasure to pleasure, and to wear away the scythe in whetting, not in working. They are brutish epicures that rise up from sleep, not to service, but to their sensual delights and vanities; as the scripture brandeth them that eat in the morning, not for strength, but excess, Eccles. x. 16, 17. The morning is the fittest time for business. Now what business should we do but the most weighty, and that which requireth the greatest heedfulness of soul, which is our communion with God?

4. Consider, it is profitable to begin the day with God, and to season the heart with some gracious exercise; as David, Ps. cxxxix. 18, 'When I awake, I am still with thee.' It sanctifieth all our other business, as the offering the first-fruits did sanctify the whole lump. And to whom should the first-fruits of our reason and sense restored be consecrated, but to him that gave us all, and is the author and preserver of them? When the world gets the start of religion, it can hardly overtake it all the day: the first thoughts leave a powerful impression upon it: Micah ii. 1, 'They devise evil upon their beds,

and when the morning is come they practise it.' With carnal men sin beginneth in the morning, stayeth in the heart all day, playeth in the fancy all night. But if you begin with God in the morning, you take God along with you all the day to your business and employment.

5. This will be some recompense for the time lost in sleeping : half our lives are consumed in it ; our time is parted between work and sleep. It is the misery and necessity we are subject unto, whilst we are in the body, that so much of our time should be spent without doing anything for God, or showing any act of love and thankfulness to him. None of the other creatures ever stand still, but are always executing and accomplishing the end for which they were made. And in heaven the blessed spirits are always beholding the face of God, and lauding and blessing his name, and need not those intermissions which we bodily creatures do. Now, though this be our necessity, and so no sin to need the refreshings of sleep, yet because so much of our time is lost, by way of recompense, the least that we should do is to take the next season ; and if health and bodily constitution will permit, to prevent the dawning of the morning, and to be as early with God as we can. All the time we can well spare should be given to God. Do but consider, since thou wentest to bed the sun hath travelled many thousand miles to give thee light this morning, and therefore what a shame it is that the sun, being continually in so swift motion, should return and find him turning and tossing in his bed, like a door upon the hinges, Prov. xx. 14, after nature is satisfied with sleep ; and that we should not rise, and own God's mercy in the rest of the night, and sanctify the labours of the day by some serious address to him. This meditation is enforced by Augustine, *indecorum est Christiano, si radius solis cum inveniatur in lecto, possit enim dicere sol, si potestatem loquendi haberet, Amplius laboravi heri, quam tu : et tamen cum jam surrexerim, tu adhuc dormis.* So Ambrose on this text, *grave est si te otiosum radius solis orientis in verecundo pudore conveniat, et lux clara inveniat oculos somnolento adhuc corpore depressos.*

Thirdly, It was a vehement and earnest prayer ; for saith David, 'I cried.' Observe—

Doct. It was earnest, though private ; and it was earnest, though he could get no satisfactory answer.

1. Earnest though private. In all our addresses to God we must be serious ; whether men see or hear or no, God seeth and heareth. A hypocrite hath a great flash of gifts in company, but is strait when alone ; but God's children are most earnest in private, when they do more particularly open their hearts to God, without taking in the necessities of others. Christ when he was withdrawn from his disciples, then he prayed *ἐκτενέστερον*, 'more earnestly,' Luke xxii. 44. Jacob sent away his company to deal with God in good earnest, and then wrestled with him : *ille dolet vere qui sine teste dolet.* Peter went out and wept bitterly. So a Christian trieth it out between God and him, when he hath a mind to plead for his own soul or for the church ; therefore hath no outward reason to move him but conscience and spiritual affection. The pharisees would pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets ; but Christ saith, 'Go into thy closet, and shut the door, and pray to thy Father in secret,' Mat. vi. 7. This is the

love and confidence we express to our Father in secret. A man may put forth himself with great warmth and vigour before others, that is slight and careless in secret addresses to God. In these secret intercourses we most taste our spirits, and discern the pure workings of affection towards God. A woman that only bemoaneth the loss of her husband in company, but banisheth all thoughts of him when alone, might justly be suspected to act a tragical part, and to pretend sorrow rather than feel it. Some will pray in secret, but customarily utter a few cold words; but David saith, 'I cried.' Remember there is one seeth in secret; as Christ saith, 'I am not alone,' John xvi. 32; and Mal. i. 14, he is a God of great majesty; he will not be put off with anything, with a short good-morrow or a hasty sigh. Consider, if you pray in good earnest, the prayer will not be lost; there is a register kept in heaven: Acts x. 4, 'Thy prayer is come up as a memorial before God.' Surely a man that believeth and consulteth these things dareth not be slight, though there be none present but God and his own soul.

2. It was earnest though the answer was delayed: I cried, I cried; I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried. The Lord cannot away with cold asking and a ceasing upon every repulse. You must continue to pray when God continueth to deny, otherwise you do not pray in faith; for when the word warrants you to pray, either by way of command or promise, you must not give over. David saith here, 'I cried, for I hoped in thy word.' When providence giveth no answer, you must take your answer out of the covenant or promise, and so answer yourself when God doth not answer you: 1 Sam. xii. 23, 'God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.' You cannot dispense with your duty, whatever the success be. Sometimes duty keepeth up prayer, sometimes the promise, and so hope of the mercy prayed for; there is no way to bring the promise and the providence of God together but by prayer or putting the promise in suit. Your obedience will be assaulted by the ingratitude of those whom you pray for, and your confidence by God's seeming denials; therefore, as long as God commandeth, and he promiseth encouragement, you are not to give way, but hold up the suit still, whatever discouragements there be without. A good dog hunts by sight as long as he can see his game, but when that is lost, he hunts by scent. Visible probabilities be a good encouragement to give a lift to the mercy, when it seemeth to be coming on; but though it be out of sight, faith keepeth the scent of the promise, keeps crying still; he heareth though he doth not answer, and the prayer will not be lost: but of this before.

Fourthly, It is the prayer of a public person, who had his distractions, and more occasions than we can possibly pretend unto, yet he would not lose his praying hours. This consideration will yield us two notes:—

1. That David had his times of converse with God.

2. That rather than fail of them, he would take them from his sleep.

1. That he had his times of converse with God: Eccles. iii. 1, 'There is a time for all things,' much more for the best things;

therefore, if you have a time for other things, to eat and drink, and follow your worldly business, surely you should have a time for prayer. Shall we have a time for everything, and no time for God? Certainly we could not want time if we did not want a heart. Many complain they have no time, and many distractions; if you have no time to pray, you have no time to be saved, no time to maintain the life and comfort and peace of your souls. David had as many employments as thou hast or canst have, therefore it is but a vain excuse. He that will regard what his own sluggish heart will allege, will never pray, never retire or be alone with God: a willing mind will find time in the midst of the greatest distractions; whomsoever he compounds with and payeth short, he will not make bold with God, and serve him by halves. Look, as David speaks in 1 Chron. xxii. 14, 'Behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the Lord an hundred thousand talents of gold and a thousand thousand talents of silver.' He was involved in wars, his exchequer impoverished and diminished, yet he kept vast sums for the temple. Surely the lean kine should not devour the fat, nor religion only be thrust out of doors. It is a more happy thing that Martha should complain of Mary than Mary neglect her duty. Holy privacy and closet work should not be neglected. It would be no loss to our other occasions if we did more prudently divide and allot out our time, and give God a good allowance rather than straiten him. Indeed, what part you should give to God is another question.

In the general, it is good to dedicate a certain part and portion of our time to the Lord of time. Idle servants must be tasked, and required to bring in their tale of bricks. A prudent allotment, such as is consistent with our occasions and course of life, would be no burden to you. I am sure it will make your duties more seasonable and orderly. It is an expression of love to give him somewhat that is our own. In the general, we are not tied to the seasons of eating and drinking, yet for conveniency we have our stated hours. The most necessary work should have a turn, and not be taken up by chance, and not left to a mere haphazard; it will make you more careful and watchful how you spend your other hours, that you may not be unfit for duty when your time of worship cometh, 1 Peter iii. 7.

Again, though we cannot bind you absolutely to a time, they that are most holy will be most frequent with God. Love will direct. They that love one another cannot be strange to each other: he that loveth God cannot be long out of his company. God trusts love; that grace is liberal and open-hearted. Christ resorted often to Bethany, because he loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, John xi. The Spirit of God will direct you by his motions, Ps. xxvii. 8. Sometimes he sendeth you into the closet; your own necessities will put you in mind; he hath left many wants upon us to bring us into his presence: James i. 5, 'If any man want wisdom,' &c.; Heb. iv. 16, 'Let us come with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in a time of need.' The interest of the spiritual life directs you; you cannot maintain it in any vigour but by some recourse to God; some time God must have.

2. Rather than fail, he would take it from his sleep. Other busi-

ness must give way to the great work and interest, especially the most inconsiderable interests of recreation. We are bidden to redeem time, Eph. v. 16, rescue it from meat, sleep, company, and recreation. Surely this is an equitable proposal, let God have as much time every day as thou spendest unprofitably. Do but observe the spending of thy time, and be ashamed that God should have such a little share.

Use. Now you see David's instance, let this persuade you to this assiduity and diligence, to be ardent and instant in prayer, taking hold of all opportunities to pursue after God, without whom you cannot live: Ps. lxxix. 32, 'Your hearts shall live, that seek God.' We cannot preserve any vitality without this. To press this—

1. Retire often from company to be alone with God. Public duties are of little profit with us because we neglect private. God complaineth of his people, Jer. ii. 32, 'That they have forgotten him days without number.' How many days have gone over your heads, and God never heard from you! You should no more forget him every day than a bride would forget her ornaments on the wedding-day.

2. Let me lay this before you; you should be betimes with God, that you may not encroach upon your other occasions; yea, that you may sanctify your other occasions, and be the fitter for it all the day after. Let not the soft enemy of sleep steal away your golden hours, and the flower and choicest part of time. A Christian that makes conscience of his time should not inure himself to a sluggish course, and turn in his bed like a door upon the hinges, if your constitution will bear it, otherwise we lay no blame upon you. The scriptures have many dissuasives from immoderate sleep, Prov. v. 9, xiii. 4, xxvi. 14, vi. 6. To be sure a Christian is to make conscience of time, and how he spendeth it; and we may sin and surfeit in sleeping as well as in eating and drinking; and therefore we must watch against the encroachments of ease and sloth, lest a sluggish humour grow natural to us, and a morbid custom that cannot be shaken off.

3. It presseth you to fervency, though in private. As much fervency, sense, and zeal as you would express before men, so much should we express when alone. The name of God must be sanctified in all that draw near to him, in private as well as in public, otherwise he is scorned rather than honoured; that it may appear you were sincere in prayer, and have not mean and low thoughts of God, otherwise you bring a suspicion upon all your public duties. There may be sometimes more assistance in public, more order and method for edification, but not more ardour and zeal. Pray with fervency, as to an all-seeing spirit. Though the Lord delayeth, yet he intendeth the enlargement of our desires: Lam. iii. 49, 50, 'Mine eye trickleth down and ceaseth not, without any intermission; till the Lord looks down from heaven and beholds.' If you are soon discouraged you will get nothing.

4. Be sure that God hath his share. If business take up more time than prayer, because of the urgency of bodily necessities, yet ordinarily a man should not spend more time in any pastime and recreations than in religious exercises. It is most equal we should first seek the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, Mat. vi. 33. The most needful duty should have most time bestowed upon it.

It is an ill character to be 'lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God,' 2 Tim. iv. 3. It is reasonable to give an equal time to God and religion as to sports and delights. Most men have no other thing to do than to eat, drink, and sleep; if they should compare their religion and their recreations, they would soon see what a large share of time one hath above the other.

Secondly, We come to the reason and encouragement of his diligence, *I hoped in thy word*; that is, because I have thy word for it, I do not doubt but in time I shall reap the fruit of my prayers.

Doct. A lively hope, grounded upon the word of God, will put us upon this vigilancy and diligence in prayer.

The reasons are taken—(1.) From the word of God, which is the ground of hope: Ps. cxxx. 5, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.' And (2.) From the nature of hope, which is the fountain of prayer.

First, From the word of God, which serveth for two uses—invitation and assurance.

1. For invitation, to give us leave to come to the throne of grace. David did not come unbidden or uninvited into God's presence; he had his word for it; the promises of the gospel give us liberty, otherwise we should not assume the boldness to appear before him: Ps. l. 15. The word is our warrant, it is as it were the holding out of the golden sceptre: 2 Sam. vii. 27, 'Therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee.'

2. For assurance and firm confidence; before the thing promised be obtained, God pawneth his word with us, which we must hold till the performance come. Now they that can thus hold it, and believe the promise, will be often in prayer, that the word may be both established to them, 2 Sam. vii. 25, and fulfilled: Ps. cxvi. 10, 'I have believed, and therefore have I spoken.'

Secondly, From the nature of hope, which implieth two things, both which have an influence upon prayer—earnest expectation, and patient tarrying the Lord's leisure.

1. Earnest expectation: Phil. i. 20, 'According to my earnest expectation and my hope.' This exciteth the soul by all means to pursue after the thing hoped for. When Daniel understood by books that the time was come, then was he vehement and earnest, Dan. ix. 2, 3. Elijah, when he saw a cloud but as big as a man's hand, he saith, 1 Kings xviii. 43, 'Go bid Ahab prepare his chariot; get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.' What we look for, we will pray for.

2. Patient tarrying. We read of 'the patience of hope,' 1 Thes. i. 3; and so, though they seem long delayed, yet hope in the promise will make us wait, and abide the performance of them; because they are assured they shall find the fruit of them at last.

Use. You see how we pray; the occasion of prayer is necessity, our necessities lead us to the promise; that inviteth us, and giveth us assurance, and yields matter for faith and hope; that puts us upon looking and waiting; these two make us pray. When we can join *patientiam spei cum ardore desiderii*; the earnestness of expectation, that keepeth us from sloth or negligence in the use of the means, or excites us to call upon God; and patience, that keeps us from fainting

or discouragement: hence cometh that earnest diligence and constant unceasing importunity, so as to give God no rest. The belief of God's promises do not make us neglect means, but to be more diligent in the use of them.

SERMON CLXVI.

Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.—VER. 148.

WE hear before of David's diligence in prayer, now in meditation. His prayer was encouraged by his hope, his hope was fed by the word, and the word improved by meditation; for he saith, 'I hope in thy word,' and then, 'Mine eyes prevent the night watches,' &c.

In the words we have—

1. An account of his vigilancy and diligence, *mine eyes prevent the night watches.*

2. The duty wherein he was exercised, *that I might meditate in thy word.*

The first branch needeth a little illustration—what is meant by 'night watches,' and what by preventing these night watches.

1. What is meant by 'night watches'? Drusius telleth us that the night among the Hebrews was divided into three watches. The first watch was called the head or beginning of the watches: Lam. iii. 19, 'Arise, cry out in the night, in the beginning of the watches; pour out thine heart like water before the Lord.' The second was called the middle watch: Judges vii. 19, 'Gideon came to the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch.' The third and last was called the morning watch: Exod. xiv. 24, 'In the morning watch the Lord troubled the host of the Egyptians.' This was the first division of the night among the Hebrews into three watches; but it seemeth afterwards, when they were acquainted with the Romans, they had four watches; as Mat. xiv. 21, 'In the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.' For every three hours they had a new watch, and according to this latter division they were called, the evening, and the midnight, and the cock-crowing, and the dawning, Mark xiii. 35. Now whether we reckon by the first or second division, it cannot be imagined that David should be wholly without sleep. Rabbi David Kimchi thinketh he gave the first watch to sleep, and the other two to the meditation of the word, and that he did this often when the nights were long. I think it is meant of the third and last watch, and so it agreeth with the dawning of the morning mentioned in the former verse; and this watch, which is called the morning watch, did David prevent, getting up early to entertain himself with delightful meditations on the word of God. The Septuagint reads it, 'Early in the morning.'

2. What is meant by preventing the night watches? Either that he was more careful to awake at several times of the night to meditate on God's word than they to keep their watches who were appointed

thereunto, or that he did not need to be called upon by them; for the watchmen were wont to tell them the seasons and watches of the night, but he needed not that help, his own desires and delights awakened him; so that in effect he saith, When others are so fast asleep that either they do not wake in the night, or if they do, it is because they are interrupted in their sleep by the noises of the watch or guard, I need no such excitation, 'for my eyes prevent the night watches;' sleep flieth from them of its own accord, that my mind may be delighted with the meditation of God's word. The points are:—

1. From the duty wherein David was exercised,

Doct. That meditation on the word of God is one duty that Christians should take care to perform.

2. From the season, his eyes prevented the night watches,

Doct. A gracious heart will take all occasions to set itself a-work on holy things, and sometimes in the night.

3. From the condition wherein he was; in some distress, for he saith, 'Save me;' and his prayers not yet heard, 'I cried, I cried, I cried,'

Doct. That it is needful to meditate on God's promises at such a time as our suit hangeth at the throne of grace without grant and effect.

The first will give us occasion to speak of the duty of meditation, and the necessity and profit of it. What the duty of meditation is, see sermon upon the 15th verse of this psalm.

Secondly, It is a necessary duty, because it is recommended to us by God, among other things enjoined in his word. He complaineth of the neglect of it: Isa. i. 3, 'Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider;' they will not think upon God, nor consider what great things he hath done for them. It is recommended to us in the practice of the saints, they sometimes meditate upon God: Ps. lxxiii. 3, 'I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate of thee in the night watches.' When David could not sleep, and had his night rest broken, his thoughts run upon God presently. Sometimes upon the works of God: Ps. cxliii. 5, 'I meditate on all thy works, I muse on the work of thine hands.' On his creation and providence. Sometimes on the word of God, that part which sets forth their duty: Ps. i. 2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.' To make the Christian's life more orderly and comely; the apostle commands us: Phil. iv. 8, 'To think on these things.' Sometimes on the promises and grounds of faith, for the support of their souls in a fainting time, as in the text; especially that part of the word which is brought unto them by the providence of God, and so we meditate upon what we read and hear: Luke ii. 19, 'Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.' We ponder things when we consider the weight and moment of them, that our hearts may be affected with them. So Moses: Deut. xxxii. 46, 'And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day;' Luke iv. 44, 'Let these sayings sink into your ears;' be seriously considered and thought of by you, not be lost or vanish into the air, or stay in the brain.

Thirdly, It is a profitable duty; it is a help—

1. To our natural faculties.

2. To our graces.

3. To our duties.

1. To our natural faculties. To our memories: we complain of weak memories, but we do not take a right course to cure them. Good things slip from us as water doth through a sieve; and why? Because we do not weigh them, and meditate upon them by deep and serious thought. Truths would stay with us longer if we did oftener think on them. So many a conviction is lost: James i. 23, 24, 'For if any man be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass, for he beholdeth himself, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.' Many a comfort is lost by neglect: Heb. xii. 5, 'And have you forgotten the exhortation which speaketh to you as children?' A weak impression is soon defaced. Many a pressing motion is lost for want of a little diligence to fasten it upon the heart: Heb. ii. 1, 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.' Meditation and serious consideration fasten a truth upon the mind and memory. Deliberate thoughts stick by us, as a lesson well conned is not easily forgotten. Civet long kept in a box, the scent remaineth when the civet is taken out. Sermons meditated upon are remembered long after they are delivered. So for understanding. We have weak understandings, slow to conceive of anything that is spiritual and heavenly; why? Because we are so little exercised in the study and contemplation of these things; whereas our judgments would ripen, and we would grow more skillful in the word of righteousness, if we did often meditate on it: Ps. cxix. 99, 'I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation. We see things *in transitu*, and know them only by hearsay, without meditation. To move the will we had need deal seriously with our own hearts ere we can gain them to a consent. Thoughts are the spokesmen that make up the match between the soul and the temptation: they were given for the like office in good things; they are the first acts of the soul to set a-work all the rest. Things lie by till we take them into our thoughts and consideration at leisure, that we may know what is their tendency, and how they concern us. You cannot imagine the gospel should work as a charm, and convert us we know not how, before consent and choice. There is a propounding and debating of terms; the greatest matters will not work on him that doth not think of them. God and Christ, and heaven and salvation, are looked upon in a cold and remiss manner without this serious consideration. And to excite, and quicken, and stir our affections, meditation is useful. We complain of deadness, and we ourselves are the cause, because we do not rouse up ourselves, excite and compel ourselves, expostulate with ourselves: Isa. lxiv. 7, 'And there is none that calleth upon thy name, and stirreth up himself to take hold of thee.' Man hath a power to what truths upon his own heart, and if we will not make use of it, and reason for God with ourselves, we are justly left under the power of deadness and stupidity of spirit.

2. It is a great help to our graces. (1.) Faith takes root by meditation: Mat. xiii. 5, 'The seed forthwith sprang up, because it had no deepness of earth.' A careless slight heart is no fit soil for faith to

grow in. (2.) Hope is made lively by consideration of the thing hoped for. (3.) Charity is inflamed by the sight and frequent view of divine objects in their beauty and amiableness.

3. The duties of religion, reading and hearing, are effectual by meditation.

The use is for exhortation, to press you to meditation; it is the mother and nurse of knowledge and godliness, the great instrument in all the offices of grace, otherwise we take up things by hearsay; this digests them, and maketh them our own.

1. It preventeth vain thoughts, both as it stocketh the heart with truth, for good seed thick set and well rooted destroyeth the weeds, and as it seasoneth the heart with a gracious disposition, and inureth it more to holy thoughts; whereas those that do not use to meditate, how are their minds pestered with swarms of vain thoughts, which wholly divert it and turn it aside from God? Man is mindless of holy things, and if they turn into the heart by accident, their entertainment is cold and careless, as a man would be used that cometh into a house full of enemies.

2. How great an affront is it to God to omit this part of communion with him; it is irksome to think of him. Saints find it otherwise: Ps. civ. 34, 'My meditation of him shall be sweet.' Some, God is said to be near in their mouth, and far from their reins, Jer xii. 2; frequently spoken of, but seldom considered by them. That soul that hath a sincere and unfeigned love to him will take some time to solace itself with him alone; to be sure God taketh it kindly at our hand: Mal. iii. 16, 'A book of remembrance was written for them that feared the Lord, and thought upon his name;' that have frequent and high thoughts of God in their hearts, without which, love will presently languish and grow cold.

3. What a neglect it is of God's messages of love that you will not consider them: Mat. xxi. 5, 'And they made light of it;' and Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation.' He hath laid out all his eternal thoughts upon a way of salvation, and manifested it to you, and you entertain it with so much scorn that you will not set your minds to it, and think it worthy a few sad and sober thoughts. What? Is it so tedious to think a thought of your own greatest concerns? Surely man is strangely depraved to refuse this.

4. What a likely means meditation is to do you good. I know it is the Lord inclineth the heart, and our thoughts work no further than God is in them, yea, he giveth us to think, 2 Cor. iii. 5. But as it is our duty, so it is a very proper means to improve our graces and our comfort; for a constant, steady, continued view of truth surely will work more than a glance. A transient view cannot leave such an impression upon us as a steady view. We taste things better when they are chewed than when they are swallowed whole. Meditation goeth over things again and again, and prieth into every part. And as it is a constant light, so it is an argumentative consideration of things. When one scale is not heavy enough, we put in weight after weight till we gain our point; bring off the heart from such a vanity, engage it to such a pursuit by our own arguings with ourselves: Prov. xii. 14, 'A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his own

mouth ;' Acts xvii. 11, 12, 'And these were more noble than they of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.' Therefore many believed, because they had searched with all readiness of mind.

5. This is an argument should prevail with God's children, that we may know our growth in grace, by the frequency, continuance, and efficacy of holy thoughts. At first good thoughts are few and rare, the heart is so crowded with vanity, that there is no room for God or his word ; for these things keep their interest in the heart and draw the mind after them, so that days pass over our heads and we forget God, Ps. x. 11 ; or if they arise in our minds, they find little entertainment there, but are gone as soon as they come. It is the policy of the enemy of our salvation to draw our minds from one thing to another, that good thoughts may pass over without fruit and benefit ; or if we force ourselves to continue, they do not warm the heart, only weary the brain. But now when truths are ever with us, they improve us : Ps. cxix. 98, 'Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me ;' Prov. vi. 22, 'When thou goest it shall lead thee, when thou sleepest it shall keep thee, and when thou walkest it shall talk with thee.' We have them always ready and at hand. They that are sound at heart can pause with delight on heavenly things. It is a good note of some progress, it is a sign the heart is heavenly, carried out with a strong and prevailing love to heavenly things, that earthly profits and vain pleasures have not such a hand over us as they were wont to have. You have gotten the mastery over your thoughts, that the best and dearest of them you can employ for God, with great fervency and continuance : other matters do not find better welcome, nor so easily jostle them out of doors. By all this it appears it is a most profitable duty.

Doct. That a gracious heart will take all occasions to set itself a-work on holy things, and sometimes in the night.

David did frequently rouse up himself in the night to solace his soul with thoughts of God ; this was a frequent and cheerful exercise and employment to him.

1. I shall prove this argueth a gracious frame of spirit.

2. Show you some reasons why we should meditate sometimes in the night.

1. It argueth a gracious frame of heart to take all occasions to set our minds a-work on holy things ; for there are three things in it :—

[1.] Plenty of divine knowledge ; the heart is well stocked, and can entertain itself without help from abroad : Ps. xvi. 7, 'I will bless the Lord who hath given me counsel ; my reins also instruct me in the night season.' He had laid up a great deal of truth in his reins or inward parts, and when sleep fled from his eyes, out it came. So Prov. vi. 21, 'Bind them continually upon thy heart, and tie them about thy neck ;' to be always ready and present with us. It is an excellent thing to have a good treasure in our hearts : Mat. xii. 35, 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things.' Many a man's heart is stuffed with vanity, and then he is

vain in his thoughts, and vain in his discourses, and vain in his actions ; yea, 'the word of God doth not dwell in him richly,' Col. iii. 16; then your thoughts are very scant and barren ; as he that hath more brass farthings in his pocket than gold or silver, will more easily pull them out at every turn. Our leanness of soul and difficulty to meditate cometh from the want of a stock of knowledge.

[2.] It argueth spiritual delight and strong love : Ps. i. 2, 'But his delight is in the law of God, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.' Did we find such comfort as David did, we would break our sleep for that end. He that delights in the word is much conversant in it, for *ubi amor ibi animus*. All the time his necessities can spare, he will spend it in these private and spiritual exercises. Many men's time hangs upon their hands ; they do not know how to spend the summer day nor the winter night ; but one that hath a strong affection to holy things, he rather wants time, such is his solace and delight in God. He beginneth his heaven upon earth, and all the time he can get he is spending this way. But if we find no such comfort and repose of soul in meditation, no wonder that we are so averse from it. Our thoughts follow our affections, delight will set the mind a-work ; when others are sleeping securely, he mindeth his salvation.

[3.] It argueth sincerity : Ps. xvii 3, 'Thou hast proved mine heart ; thou hast visited me in the night ; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing.' In the night when darkness concealeth me from the eyes of men, then I exercise myself in spiritual thoughts. Many put on religion as a disguise in the day ; in public actions they personate a zeal, and act a devout part ; but that is to be sincere when God hath a great share in our closest privacies and retirement.

2. Sometimes take the night as a special occasion : Ps. lxiii. 6, 'When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches ;' Ps. lxxvii. 6, 'I call to remembrance my song in the night.' There is a double help for meditation in the night—

[1.] Solitude, then we are alone, and therefore fittest to meditate, when nobody disturbs us.

[2.] The silence of the night is also a help, when nothing is heard or seen to distract attention.

Use. What use shall we make of this ? We cannot lay a burden upon your consciences, and by way of absolute necessity exact these nocturnal meditations from you ; only in the general—

1. As much as our strength and natural necessities will permit, we should be meditating night and day. It may be a shame to us that many tradesmen are up afore day to follow their callings, and that they should excel us. The Christians had their morning hymns to Christ in the times of persecution.

2. We may press you to the affection, though not to the season ; to be stored with good matter, and to have a strong delight in this work, and sincerity to make conscience of private duties.

3. If we wake in the night and our rest is broken off, then to exercise ourselves in holy thoughts. Many times it falleth out that we cannot sleep ; now we should spend the time in meditation and prayer, not in vain thoughts, or entertaining ourselves with carnal musings, or perplexing and anxious thoughts about the troubles that we are under.

4. If David waked in the night, how much are they to blame that snort and sleep in the day, even in the time of worship, when others are entertaining communion with God. Surely if they had earnest affections this could not always be. The example of Eutyclus should deter these; Acts xx. 9, 'And there sat in the window a young man named Eutyclus, being fallen into a deep sleep; and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead;' Mat. xxvi. 40, 'What! could not ye watch with me one hour?'

Doct. That meditation of the promises is very seasonable when the answer of our prayers is denied.

For this is very powerful to support our fainting hopes, and to cheer and revive our drooping spirits. There is support in the word, and comfort in the word; therefore we should much meditate on the promises at such a time. The best holdfast that we have of God is by his promise. Whatsoever his dispensations be, this will give satisfaction enough. Though you cannot find what you would, his word is certain; though no appearance of performance, his word is sure enough to fasten upon. The grounds of faith are more sweet and satisfactory the more they are examined and looked upon.

SERMON CLXVII.

Hear my voice, according to thy loving-kindness: O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment.—VER. 149.

In these words you have—(1.) David's prayer; (2.) The grounds of his support, or his encouragements in asking.

1. His prayer is double—(1.) General, for audience, 'Hear my voice;' (2.) Particular, for quickening, 'Quicken me.'

2. His encouragements and grounds of confidence in asking are also two—(1.) God's loving-kindness; (2.) His judgment. Both together imply the loving-kindness of God manifested in the word or expressed and engaged in the promises. The points are three:—

Doct. 1. One blessing which the children of God do see a need often and earnestly to ask of God is quickening. David ever and anon reneweth his request, and he is loath to be denied; and therefore, before he saith, 'Quicken me,' he saith, 'Hear my voice.'

Doct. 2. The main argument which God's children have to plead in prayer is his own favour and loving-kindness. That is David's argument in the text, 'Hear my voice, according to thy loving-kindness.'

Doct. 3. The mercy and loving-kindness of God, manifested and implied in the promises of the gospel, doth notably encourage us to ask help from him; for David doth not only say, 'According to thy loving-kindness,' but, 'According to thy judgment.'

Doct. 1. For the first point, one blessing which the children of God do see a need often and earnestly to ask of God is quickening. Here I shall inquire—

1. What is quickening.

2. Give you some reasons why the children of God do see a need so often and earnestly to ask it of God.

First, What is quickening?

1. By quickening some understand restitution to happiness; for a calamitous man is as one dead and buried under deep and heavy troubles, and his recovery is a life from the dead, or a reviving from the grave. So quickening seemeth to be taken, Ps. lxxi. 20, 'Thou which hast showed me great and sore troubles shalt quicken me again, and bring me up from the depths of the earth.'

2. Others understand by quickening the renewing and increasing in him the vigour of his spiritual life. That he beggeth that God would revive, increase, and preserve that life which he had already given, that it might be perfected and consummated in glory, that he might be ever ready to bring forth the habits of grace into acts.

The use which we should make of it is to press you—

1. To be sensible of the temper of your hearts, and see whether you want quickening, yea or no. The feeling of spiritual deadness argueth some life and sense yet left. You have attained to so much of life, and do retain it in such a measure, as to be able to bemoan yourselves to God. Most observe their bodies, but very few their souls: if their bodies be ill at ease or out of order, they complain. Men that go on in a track of customary duties see no need of quickening; therefore this humble sense is a good sign. Matins and vespers coldly run over never put us upon the feeling of indispositions, but only duties done with some spirit and life, as a smith blows not the bellows on cold iron or a dead coal. Who would seek quickening when not serious in the work? They that go on in the cold wont of duties never regard the frame of their hearts.

2. When you want quickening, ask it of God. He brought us into the state of life at first, and therefore every moment we must beg of him that he would quicken us, that he would continue it, and perfect his own work: Cant. i. 4, 'Draw me; we will run after thee.' There is no running, no preserving the vitality of grace, without his renewed influence: Ps. xxii. 29, 'None can keep alive his own soul.' Therefore, when we find this deadness or decay of life, to whom should we go but to the fountain of life to repair it? No creature doth subsist of itself, or act of itself.

3. Ask it earnestly. David prefaceth a general prayer before this request, and saith, 'Hear my voice,' as loath to be denied. Many ask it of course, rather use it as a mannerly form when they are entering upon holy duties, than a broken-hearted request. See you desire it heartily: Ps. cxix. 40, 'Behold, I have longed after thy precepts; quicken thou me in thy righteousness.' A man's heart is set upon it, and will not sit down with the distemper, as contented and satisfied with a dead frame of heart: quickening is for longing souls, that would fain do the work of God with a more perfect heart.

4. Expect this grace in and through Jesus Christ, who came down from heaven for this end: John x. 10, 'I am come that they might have life, and might have it more abundantly.' That was his end in coming into the world, to procure life for his people, and not only bare life, but liveliness and comfort, yea, glory hereafter: he died to pur-

chase it for us: John vi. 51, 'This is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world.' His incarnation and taking on him our nature is the channel and conduit through which the quickening virtue that is in the Godhead is conveyed to us; and his offering up himself in that nature by his eternal Spirit doth purchase and merit the application and annunciation of this his quickening virtue to our souls, and prepareth him to be fit meat for souls. That same flesh and human nature of Christ that is offered up a ransom to justice, is also the bread of life for souls to feed upon. Souls are fed with meditations upon his death and sufferings. The bread which he giveth by way of application is his flesh, which he gave by way of ransom; every renewed act of faith draweth an increase of life from him.

5. Consider how God worketh it in us. The Father of spirits loveth to work with his own tools. These three agree in one—the Spirit, the word, and the renewed heart. The one is the author, the other the instrument, and the last the object. There is the Spirit acting, and the habit of grace acted upon, and the word and sacraments are the instruments and means. For God will do it rationally, and by a lively light. God forceth not the nature of second causes against their own inclination. It is pleasing to him when we desire him to renew his work, and to bring forth the actings of grace out of his own seed, and to blow with the wind, the breath of his Spirit, on the gardens, that the spices may flow out, Cant. iv. 15. If one of these be wanting, there can be no quickening. Not the Spirit, for he applieth all and doth all in the hearts of believers. It is from him that we have the new life of grace and all the activity of it: Gal. v. 25, 'If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.' Then there must be a renewed heart; for God doth first infuse the principles of the new life, and gracious habits and power into the soul, next he doth actuate those powers, or stir them up to do what is good; otherwise we do but blow to a dead coal. Then the word and sacraments come as God's means which are fitted to work upon the new creature. These are full of spiritual reason, and suited to the sanctified understandings of men and women.

6. Consider God's loving-kindness, how ready he is to grant this. He will not deny the gift of the Holy Ghost to them that ask him, Luke xi. 13. It is an argument not *a pari*, but *a minore ad majus*. God is more able and willing to give than earthly parents, who are but half fathers. This is a spiritual and necessary blessing, and God is too fatherly to deny it to his children. You may deny an apple to a wanton child, but you will not deny bread to a fainting child, the bowels of a father will not permit you to do that; you may deny them superfluities in wisdom, but your love will not permit you to deny them necessities. Meat is not so necessary to revive and refresh the body, as grace for the soul, and his holy inspirations to act and guide you. And will God deny these requests?

7. Know when you have received quickening. Many Christians look for rapt and ecstatic motions, and so do not own the work of God when it hath passed upon them; they underrate their own experiences, and so cannot take notice of God's faithfulness. Sense, appetite, and activity are the fruits of life and quickening.

[1.] We have the more sense of indwelling sin as a heavy burden, Rom. vii. 24. None groan so sorely as those that are made partakers of a new life. *Elementa non gravitant in suis locis*. A delicate constitution is more sensible of pain. Wicked men scarce feel deep wounds given to their conscience, nor have any remorse for gross sins; God's children, their hearts smite them for the smallest disorders and irregularities.

[2.] Appetite after Christ, his graces and comforts, 1 Peter ii. 2; the more life any have, the more craving of food to maintain it in being; they are always hungering and thirsting after God, Mat. v. 6; our appetite will be after the things that conduce to the maintaining and preserving that being which they have. If a man lose his appetite, the body pineth and languisheth, and strength decayeth: desire prepareth the soul to take in its supplies. Your life is in good plight when that is desired, τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα, and it will be a means of spiritual growth, a kindly appetite after this milk. They are under a great decay who have lost their appetite after the gospel.

[3.] Activity in duties. That we may honour Christ: 1 Peter ii. 4, 5, 'To whom coming as a living stone, ye also as lively stones are built up into a spiritual house.' Christ liveth, and we live by him, as the stones in the building carry a proportion with the corner-stone; so Christians as the body with the head. It must needs be so, because of God's Spirit dwelling in us, Ezek. xxxvi. 27; John vii. 37; and because of the graces in a Christian—faith and love. Faith working by love is the great evidence of the new creature. If faith and love be strong, it will quicken us to do much for God; the apprehension of faith doth enliven our notions of God, Christ, heaven, and hell; faith puts life into our thoughts of him. Love is a notable pleader and urger: 2 Cor. v. 14, 'The love of Christ constraineth us,' &c.

Secondly, The reasons why, &c.

1. They that have so much to do with God do see a need of it; for he is a living God, and will be served in a lively manner: Rom. xii. 11, 'Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' They that serve the Lord; negatively, must not be slothful in business; affirmatively, fervent in spirit. God will not be served negligently, coldly, but with life and earnestness: 'The twelve tribes served God ἐν ἐκτενείᾳ, instantly,' Acts xxvi. 7; instantly serving God with the uttermost of their strength. He that hath a right to our all must have our best; surely he will not be put off with every slight thing. Now the children of God, that are sensible of this, are earnest for quickening, that they may serve God in such a way as becometh him, with life and power and zeal; for the manner in every duty is to be regarded as well as the matter. A man may do many things that are good, but there is no life in what he doth. He prayeth, but without any life in prayer, dead in prayer; heareth, but no life in hearing, dull of hearing. All things in a Christian may be counterfeited, but life cannot be counterfeited, that cannot be painted.

2. They are acquainted with themselves, and observe the frame and posture of their own spirits. Now they that know themselves will see a need of quickening—

[1.] Because of the instability and changeable frame of man's heart;

it hardly stayeth long in the same state ; now it is up, and anon it is down, as the constant experience of the saints witnesseth. Sometimes they have a forwardness and strong propension of heart to that which is good, at other times a loathness and dulness or unfitness to perform any spiritual service, when their will is more remiss and their affections umbent. It is not indeed the constant frame of their hearts, yet it is a disease incident to the saints ; even good men may feel a slowness of heart to comply with the will of God, and some hanging off from duty. *Spontanea lassitudines sunt signa imminuentis morbi.* So is this laziness and backwardness of spirit a sign of some great spiritual distemper. Sometimes they are carried with great largeness of heart, and full sail of affections ; at other times they are in bonds and straits, that they cannot pour out their hearts before God : Ps. lxxvii. 4, ‘I am so troubled that I cannot speak.’ Sometimes they have great life and vigour, at other times no such lively stirrings, but are flat and cold and dead ; when, with Samson, they think to go forth and shake themselves as at other times, Judges xvi. 20, by sad experience they find that their locks are gone, that their understandings are lean, sapless, and their affections cold, and their delight and vigour lost. Man is a sinful, weak, inconstant creature ; his heart is as unstable as water : and much of this levity and instability remaineth with us after grace, as is seen in the various postures of spirit that we are under.

[2.] Because of the constant opposition of the flesh. There is an opposite principle in our hearts, Gal. v. 17 ; the body of death that dwelleth in us doth always resist the life of the spirit in us ; and therefore God must renew the influences of his grace to preserve life. There are desires against desires, and delights against delights ; this must needs abate our vigour. The spirit draweth one way, the flesh another. It is drawing : James i. 14, ‘Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.’ It is depressing : Heb. xii. 1, ‘Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.’ Carnal affections hang as a weight, retarding us in our heavenly flight and motions. It is warring : Rom. vii. 23, ‘I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin.’ And therefore the Lord had need to cherish the new creature and good seed, which cannot but be weakened with this opposition.

[3.] Because our outward condition doth work a great change in us. A Christian should, and in some measure doth, carry an equal mind in all conditions, and keep the same pace whether he goeth up-hill or down-hill, and have his heart fixed in God whatever falleth out : Ps. cxii. 7, ‘He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.’ But, alas ! we are much discomposed oftentimes, especially at the first onset, by our outward estate ; when under great afflictions, it puts a damp upon our spirits, and we cannot serve God so cheerfully : Lev. x. 19, ‘And Aaron said unto Moses, Behold, this day have they offered their sin-offering and their burnt-offering before the Lord, and such things have befallen me ; and if I had eaten the sin-offering to-day, should it have been accepted in the sight of the

Lord.' So Hezekiah, it is said of him 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, when Hezekiah was sick unto death, and he prayed unto the Lord, and he gave him a sign, that Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him, for his heart was lifted up. We are too apt to be dejected and cast down with worldly troubles, or exalted and puffed up with worldly comforts, and both bring on deadness upon the heart, both worldly sorrow and carnal complacency. It is not requisite that a child of God should be without all sense of his condition, and it cannot be supposed that this sense should always be kept within bounds, and under the coercion and government of grace, considering our weakness; and therefore a Christian receiveth some taint from the changes he passes through, as the water doth from the soil through which it runneth. He is sometimes in credit, sometimes in disgrace; sometimes rich, sometimes poor; sometimes sick and in pain, at other times in health and firm constitution of body. Now, though it argueth small strength to faint in ordinary afflictions, Prov. xxiv. 10, and a light spirit to be puffed up like a bubble with every slight blast, yet when troubles are heavy and pressing, God's best servants have been ready to die and faint, and in a full estate it is hard to keep down carnal rejoicing. By both, the freedom of following God's service cheerfully may often be interrupted.

[4.] Because we sin away our life and strength, and by our careless walking contract deadness and hardness of heart. The mind, like the eye, is soon offended and out of temper: we forfeit the quickening influences of his Spirit, upon which the activity of grace dependeth. To correct our sinful rashness, and to teach us more watchfulness and caution, God withdraweth, Phil. ii. 12, 13. Be the sin a sin of commission, especially if grievous and heinous; as David found a shrewd abatement of life and vigour after his foul sin, Ps. li. 11, 12; or a sin of omission, when we neglect God or serve him slightly. If we give way to deadness, Isa. lxiv. 6, rest in the work wrought, and are more willing to get a duty over than to perform it with any life and vigour, God suspends his quickening. If you do not mind the work, why should God quicken you in it?

3. The third reason is taken from the nature of God's dispensations. They do often and earnestly ask quickening, because God giveth out by degrees, and would keep us in constant dependence: 'In him we live, move' (*κινούμεθα*), 'and have our being,' Acts xvii. 28, both as creatures and new creatures. There is a constant concurrence of his motions and influences by their beings and operations. God will endear his grace to us by bringing us daily under new debt; and therefore he doth not give us all our stock and portion in our hands, lest we neglect him, as the prodigal did his father. By multiplied and renewed acts of grace he doth more commend his love to us; every day he must quicken us, and in every duty. If so much rain fell in a day as would suffice the earth for seven years, the commerce between the air and the earth would cease; or if a man could eat so much at one meal as to go in the strength of it all his life, there would be no ground to pray for daily bread; therefore God doth dispense his assistances so as you must still wait upon him and be calling to him. He keepeth grace in his own hand that he may often hear from us.

Doct. 2. The main argument which God's children have to plead in prayer is his own favour and loving-kindness. I shall show—

1. That this is a modest, humble, and pious argument.

2. This is a comfortable and encouraging argument.

First, It is a modest argument, and it were good if we could learn this modesty of David. He was one much in prayer, diligent in keeping God's statutes, abundant in all acts of devotion, spent nights in meditation, and yet after all this placeth all his hopes in the mercy and loving-kindness of God, and desireth only to be heard according to mercy. But in us there is a secret carnal notion of God as if he were our debtor. If we act for him, or suffer anything for him, we carry it as if God were obliged to us : Isa. lviii. 3, 'Wherefore have we fasted?' &c. We cannot be at a fast, give a little alms, or make a prayer, but we think we have merited much at God's hands. Oh ! this is against all reason. Alas ! what profit can we be to God ? Job xxxv. 6–8. God is above the injuries and benefits of the creature ; what miss had he of angels and men in those innumerable ages of duration that went before any created being ? And as it is against reason, so it is against all the declarations God hath made of himself to us : Ezek. xxxvi. 32, 'Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord of hosts : be ashamed and confounded for your own ways.' So Titus iii. 4–6, 'But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost ; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.' In short, no worth in us, or righteousness of ours, is that merit and righteousness by virtue of which we are accepted with God. Our works and righteousness are not that condition by which we receive and apply this merit ; that is faith. No works or merit are a motive, or the first inducing cause to move God to give us that faith, but all is from his loving-kindness and readiness to do good to the creatures. Again, it is contrary to the practice of the saints and children of God, who, though never so holy and never so good, yet still they plead mercy, and this by direction from him who knoweth what plea is fittest for creatures to use to God, Luke xvii. 10. As it is not the merit of one part of the earth that it lieth nearer the sun than another, only the Creator would have it so, so still the scripture crieth down works and merits in the creature in all these gracious influences ; they all come from God's bowels of compassion to his creatures labouring under difficulties. He loveth to act as a free agent in giving, continuing, and actuating the life of his creatures, whether natural or spiritual. Yea, lastly, any other principle would be against our profit, as well as God's glory. Our profit, both as to duty and success, we should never carry it dutifully to God if we did not acknowledge that all came from grace. Whence cometh impatience, murmurings, contempt of things afforded, but from a secret opinion of our merit and deserving ? They that prescribe to God ascribe too much to themselves ; that prescribe to God for time, measure, and kind, are hasty, and murmur under delays and suspensions of grace. And as to success, without this modest and humble claim, God rejecteth the request : 'For he resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble,' 1 Peter

v. 5. Spiritual pride is the worst of all pride. The humble supplicant may expect increase of grace which is denied to others: Ps. cxlvii. 11, 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.' Such as fear God, and serve him diligently, and yet put all their confidence in his mercy, these are those whom the Lord delights in, to keep communion with them, and pour out his blessings upon them. This is enough to show you it is a humble, modest plea.

Secondly, It is a comfortable, encouraging argument; which that it may appear to you, let us consider—

1. The nature of it.
2. The kinds of it.
3. The proofs and demonstrations of it.
4. The end of it.

1. The nature of it. The loving-kindness of God noteth his disposition to do good upon his own motives, or his self-inclination to do good to his creatures, especially to his people: 2 Sam. vii. 21, 'According to thine heart hast thou done this;' his native willingness to employ what goodness is in him for the good of his creatures. Now this doth much encourage poor sinners to draw nigh to God for such mercy as they stand in need of. Justice giveth what is due, but mercy what is needed; justice seeks a fit object, mercy and loving-kindness a fit occasion. His justice will not hinder his mercy to be bountiful.

2. The kinds of it. God's loving-kindness is twofold—general and special.

[1.] There is a general kindness and good-will from God as creator to all his creatures, especially to mankind. The effects and fruits of this general kindness flow in the channel of common providence. So it is said, Ps. cxlv. 9, 'The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.' God is good to all things, to all persons; he bestoweth many common blessings upon the wicked, as natural life and being, health and wealth, &c. So Ps. cxlvii. 9, 'He giveth to the beasts his food, to the young ravens which cry.' To wicked men, Mat. v. 45. Common blessings do not always argue a good people, but they always argue a good God. God giveth the beasts their food in due season, Ps. civ. 27, 28. Now this is some ground of hope, and so improved, Ps. cxlv. 15, 16. If he heareth the cries of the creatures, he will hear the prayers of the saints; if a kite, much more a child. You see the Lord doth not cast off the care of any living creature which he hath made, but hath a constant eye of providence upon them, that their hunger may be satisfied, and they may have that sort of good which is fitting for them, and that in time and season, before they are spent with wants; and will he not answer the longings and expectations and cries of his people, and pity their faintings, and give that grace which they so earnestly seek?

[2.] Over and above this common kindness, there is a more entire special love and kindness towards believers in Christ. This may be admired rather than expressed: Ps. xxxvi. 7, 'How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God!' This is unto admiration, his common kindness, his preservation of man and beast. This is the fruit of his eternal love: Jer. xxxi. 3, 'With everlasting love have I loved thee, and

therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee;' and this is expressed in blessing them with special and saving benefits in Christ. The effects of his special kindness do all relate to life and godliness, and are conveyed to us through the conduit of Christ's merit and intercession, in and by whom he doth fulfil in us all the good pleasure of his goodness, 2 Thes. i. 11, 12. Now this special kindness must needs be a mighty encouragement to the saints to come to him (since he loveth them with such a free and special love) for all that mercy they stand in need of. The former speaketh the goodness of God to all his creatures; this to themselves in particular; both together a notable support; yea, though we have not yet any experience of the goodness of God, yet since there is such a thing as self-inclination in God to do good to his people, and, besides this, a readiness to express his love to all his creatures, more especially to every one, without respect of persons, that cometh to him: Ps. lxxxvi. 5, 'For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy to all them that call upon thee.' Take the cause, and you do not know what you may find. It may be your portion and lot.

3. The proofs and demonstrations of this loving-kindness.

[1.] He hath given evident proof and infallible demonstration of it in Christ: 1 John iv. 12, 'In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through him.' The cause or first motive was love; his means was the sending of Christ to be a propitiation; his end, life spiritual and eternal. This is such a glorious instance and manifestation of the love of God, that poor creatures are encouraged to draw nigh to God for such mercy as they stand in need of. It is a hidden love; here is a convincing proof and real demonstration by so glorious an effect and fruit of it. It was not a well-wishing love only, nor a love concealed, but manifested, and that by a signal proof.

[2.] The instances of God's loving-kindness to others; so that 'according to thy loving-kindness,' will be according to that grace and mercy which thou art wont to show to others of thy servants. All that have had to do with God will assure you that he is a gracious God, full of kindness and mercy. There are examples of it, 1 Tim. i. 16; and Eph. ii. 7, 'That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.' Instances of God's loving-kindness towards others have a peculiar fitness and efficacy to convince us how exceedingly gracious God is, and so to draw us to the same fountain of grace for pardon and life to ourselves. These examples do more than the doctrinal declaration, because they do not only show that mercy and grace may be had, but that it hath been attained unto by those who in all respects did judge themselves, and were really unworthy of it, as unable to lay hold of it, and to make good use of it afterwards, as we ourselves. The ice is broken, the ford ridden before us; therefore we may venture our salvation and acceptance with God upon the same grace.

[3.] His former love to ourselves. At first he took us with all our faults, and betrothed us unto himself, in loving-kindness and tender mercy, Hosea ii. 19; and therefore he will still do us good, freely

and bountifully, and so we may answer all objections from God's wonted goodness towards us. When he hath entered into covenant with us out of his love and bounty, we may well expect that upon the same terms he should keep covenant. The continuance is more easily believed and asked than the beginning and first grant: Ps. xxxvi. 10, 'O continue thy loving-kindness unto them that know thee, and thy righteousness to the upright in heart.' When by experience we have found what it can do for unworthy creatures, we may the better expect it should help us on all occasions.

4. The end why God exerciseth it; which is his glory, even the glory of his grace and loving-kindness; that that might be acknowledged and exemplified by those that are partakers of it even to be altogether glorious: Eph. i. 6, 'To the praise of his glorious grace, wherein he hath accepted us in the beloved;' that it may be owned and esteemed as free and liberal, and working of its own accord. We only cross God's end when we do not plead it, admire it, and esteem it highly, and improve it for our comfort; for this is God's end in the whole business of our salvation from first to last, that men and angels might be excited to set forth the praises of his rich mercy and free grace. And here is a new encouragement to ask gracious supplies of God, according to his loving-kindness, or upon the account of that attribute, even that his grace may be more esteemed and exalted in our hearts: Ps. cix. 21, 'But do thou for me, O God the Lord, for thy name's sake; because thy mercy is good, deliver thou me.' It concerneth him in point of his chief honour and glory to do good to his people; that he may be known, and owned to be a good and a gracious or loving God.

Use. Well, then, if this be the great plea of the saints—

1. Let us meditate often of the loving-kindness of God, of his pitying, and pardoning, and lovingly entreating poor sinful and broken-hearted creatures that come to him. This should be our daily meditation; *bonum est primum et potentissimum nomen Dei*, saith Damascene—it is the first-born and chiefest name of God. We cannot conceive of God by anything that concerneth us so much as his goodness; by that we know him, and for that we love him. We admire him with reverence for his other titles, but this doth first insinuate with us, and command our respect to him. The first temptation that ever was in the world was to weaken the conceit of his goodness in the heart of the creature; as if God were envious, harsh, and sour in his restraints; still it is a great temptation, yet 'God is good to Israel,' Ps. lxxiii. 1. Oh! let us fortify our hearts with frequent thoughts of his goodness and loving-kindness! As we should do this every day, so especially upon the sabbath-day: Ps. xcii. 2, 'I will show forth thy loving-kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night.' We should do this with all the advantage we can use, more especially when we are in his presence, conversing with him and ministering before him: Ps. xlviii. 9, 'We have thought of thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.' We should often and seriously think when we come to God: Surely now we have to do with a loving and gracious God, whether we wait upon him in prayer, or the word, or sacraments; if any prayer to make or comfort to expect.

2. Observe the fruits and effects of it, and value them. They that are students in providence, shall not seek long before they find God to be a God full of loving-kindness and tender mercy : Ps. cvii. 43, 'Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.' Few regard it, or look after it ; but they that do pry into the course of his dealings shall not be without many instances of God's love and free favour to them. Now, when you have found it out, value it : Ps. lxiii. 3, 'Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.' You shall have rich experiences, such as will fill you with joy unspeakable and glorious, to be esteemed above all comforts whatsoever.

3. Praise God for it. This should be a lively motive to praise him : Ps. cxxxviii. 2, 'I will worship towards thy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth.' These two are the cause of all we have ; it is without any deserving of ours, only because we have to do with a gracious and faithful God : Isa. lxiii. 7, 'I will mention the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness towards the house of Israel which he hath bestowed on them, according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving-kindness.' The prophet speaketh as if he could never find words enough, or pregnant enough, to express his sense of God's gracious dealing, so bountifully had he dealt with his people.

4. Let us improve this loving-kindness and readiness of God's mercy to help penitent supplicants.

[1.] In a way of trust, the least degree of which is enough to keep the sinner from running away from him ; how grievous soever his offences and demerits be, yet come to him ; say, as David, Ps. li. 1, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness ; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.' Yea, make it a ground of confidence and support : Ps. lxi. 16, 'Hear me, O Lord, for thy loving-kindness is good ; turn unto me, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies.'

[2.] In a way of fear, that we may not interrupt the sense of it, or stop the current of his good-will : Ps. xxvi. 3, 'Thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes, and I have walked in thy truth.' It is the ground of all our confidence ; lose not that : the Lord taketh notice of them that trust in his goodness : Nahum i. 7, 'The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knoweth them that trust in him.'

There is one word yet undiscussed, 'According to thy judgment.' Some by *judgment* understand wisdom and prudence. The word will sometimes bear that sense : Micah iii. 8, 'But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord and of judgment,' &c. ; as we say a man of judgment, for an understanding person. In this sense, 'According to thy judgment,' will be, as thou thinkest fit ; but surely 'judgment' here is to be understood in the notion of his covenant, or the rule according to which he judgeth of men, for it is one of the terms by which the word is expressed. 'Judgment' is sometimes put for the covenant of works, or his strict remunerative justice. David declineth it under this notion : Ps. cxliii. 2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord.' And this is called by the apostle,

‘judgment without mercy,’ James ii. 13. Sometimes for the covenant of grace, and free promises of God, or that merciful right which he hath established between him and his people, wherein God acteth as an absolving and pardoning judge. Of this, see ver. 132. And of this the prophet speaketh, Isa. i. 27, ‘Zion shall be redeemed with judgment;’ that is, by his mercy promised according to his judgment. David desireth to be *quicken*d. From thence observe—

Doct. 3. That God’s mercy and loving-kindness, manifested and impledged in the promises of the gospel, doth notably encourage us to ask help from him.

You have heard what encouragement we have by the loving-kindness of God; now what we have over and above that by his judgment.

First, Quickening and enlivening grace is promised in the new covenant.

1. In general, from the general undertaking of the covenant. The covenant of grace differeth from all other covenants in the world, because everything that is required therein is also promised; and therefore it is called, ‘The promise,’ Gal. iii. 18, because God hath promised both the reward and the condition—faith and perseverance therein, as well as righteousness, pardon, and life; the new heart to bring us into the covenant, and the continual assistance of grace to keep us in that covenant. And so it differs from the usual covenants that pass between man and man. Among men, each party undertaketh for and looketh after his own part of the covenant; but leaveth the other to look to his duty and his part of the engagement. But here the duties required of us are undertaken for by him that requireth them. No man filleth his neighbour’s hand with anything to pay his rent to him, or enableth him to do what he hath covenanted to do; but God filleth our hand with a stock, yea more than a stock, of habitual grace, with actual influences, to draw forth habits into act; and doth with strength so far enable us to perform every commanded duty, that in the performance thereof we may be accepted. Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27, God owneth there not only the principles of acting, but also the excitement of these principles; yea, the very act itself. He hath undertaken to infuse the principle, and stir up the acts and exercise of it: ‘I will cause you to walk in my statutes.’ So Jer. xxxii. 39, 40, ‘And I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them and of their children after them, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good, but I will put my fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from me.’ Besides converting grace, superadded influences. It differeth from the covenant of works, that had more of a law, and less of a promise: there was a promise of reward to the obeyer, but no promise of giving obedience. God indeed gave Adam a stock of habitual grace, but no promise of assisting grace. There man was to keep the covenant; here, in effect, the covenant keepeth us, Jer. xxxii. 40. And indeed therein lieth the exceeding graciousness of the covenant of grace, that God undertaketh for both parties, and worketh in his people all that is required for entering into and keeping this covenant with him.

2. In particular, this part of actual influence, which is more espe-

cially called quickening, is promised in the covenant of grace; for the covenant concerneth mainly the life of grace, the care of which he hath taken into his own hands, not to lay it down till it be perfected in the life of glory; and therefore alloweth his children to repair to him when their life is any way enfeebled or decayed: so that besides that the general undertaking of his covenant will warrant such a plea, his particular promises of preserving and restoring our life will embolden us to ask quickening; for with respect to his judgment or covenant engagement, God is called, 'The God of our life,' Ps. xlii. 8, and 'The strength of our life,' Ps. xxvii. 1. The care of life, bodily, spiritual, and everlasting, lieth upon him; by virtue of the covenant he hath undertaken to keep it, feed it, renew it in all the decays of it, till we be possessed of the life of glory.

Secondly, The advantage we have from this promise. We have a double argument, not only from God's mercy, but his truth; both which do assure us that God is not only easy to be entreated, but bound and tied by his own free condescension. His loving-kindness sheweth that he may do it for us; his judgment, that in some part he will do it. He is not only inclined, but obliged, which is a new ground of hope. His promise in the new covenant inferreth a debt of favour, though not of justice; when God hath bound himself by promise, both his mercy and fidelity are concerned to do us good. We have not only the freeness of God's love to encourage us, but the certainty of his help engaged in the promise. God inviteth men to him by his grace, and engageth his truth to do them good. The nature of God is one encouragement, he is wonderful ready to do good; but in his covenant he hath established a right to believers to seek his mercy, so that all is made more sure and comfortable to us.

Use. To encourage the people of God, when they miss his help in the spiritual life, to lay open their case to God. The thought of strict justice striketh us dumb, there is no claiming by that covenant; but the remembrance of this merciful right or judgment should open our mouths in prayer, and loosen our tongues in acquainting God with our case: Lord, I want that life and quickening which thy promises seem to speak of. You may do it with the more confidence for these reasons:—

1. Consider the tenor of this judgment, or the terms thereof, the mildness of the court in which you plead; it is not a covenant of justice, but of favour; in it grace taketh the throne, not justice; the judge is Christ; the law according to which judgment is given is the gospel; our plea is grace, not merit; the persons allowed to plead are penitent sinners; yea, they are not only allowed to plead for themselves, but they have an advocate to plead for them: the very judge is their advocate! Oh! let us hold God to this latter covenant, and judgment of grace, mercy, and goodness: Lord, upon these terms we dare come unto thee.

2. Consider the blessing offered in this covenant: Heb. iv. 16, 'Mercy and grace to help.' It offereth mercy for pardon of sins, a blessing which the law knew not; and grace to help, that is for our purpose. It is a covenant which alloweth you expenses to run the way of God's commandments, gives you straw to make your brick,

fillet your hand to pay the master's rent. It is not a hard master, to reap where it soweth not, but will cause you to walk and run whither it sends you.

3. Consider, there is nothing in God contrary to us, or standeth in our way, for it is all removed by this judgment or covenant. If anything, it is the justice of God; but that doth not stand in our way, being satisfied by Christ.

[1.] If you take justice, as it implieth his remunerative and vindictive justice, we have the merit of Christ to plead: there is a ransom paid by him, to whom the sinner is fled for refuge. So that God may do us good without any blemish or imputation of defect to his righteousness and justice against sin, Rom. iii. 24, 25; 1 John i. 9.

[2.] As righteousness implieth the rectitude of his nature: 'In thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness,' Ps. cxliii. 1. These things, that terrify others, comfort the godly; the righteousness and truth of God are their support. His veracity is a part of his righteousness, as it becometh every just man to make good his promises.

SERMON CLXVIII.

They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy law.—VER. 150.

HERE in this verse he giveth an account what was the cause of his frequent and earnest crying unto God, of his hope, meditation, begging for quickening; because he was ready to be destroyed by those who every day went off further and further from God's law; they were ready to accomplish their wicked and malicious purpose upon him, and prepared for it, and even now at his heels to do him harm and mischief: 'They draw nigh,' &c.

In the words we have—

1. An intimation of approaching danger, *they draw nigh that follow after mischief.*

2. A description of those from whom the danger was feared, *they are far from thy law.*

First, 'They draw nigh,' &c. The enemy is at hand, even at the doors; the prophet speaketh as if he did hear the sound of his feet, yet they are as far from thy law as near to destroy me.

Doct. Extreme danger may sometimes draw nigh unto, and even tread upon the heels of God's people.

Reasons.

1. From the implacable malice of their enemies.

[1.] They seek the destruction of the people of God, nothing less will content them; this is implied in the word *mischief* in the text: *τὸ μὴ εἶναι*, Ps. lxxxiii. 4, 'Come let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may no more be in remembrance.' That is their aim, that not one of that denomination be left: Ps. cxxxvii. 7, 'Rase, rase it, even to the foundation thereof,' Nothing will satisfy

them but utter ruin and extirpation : they that expect milder terms from the seed of the serpent, flatter themselves with a vain hope.

[2.] They follow this end with all industry and diligence ; this is implied in the phrase *that follow after mischief*. They watch all occasions, pursue every advantage to bring their purpose to pass. Some in scripture are said to follow after righteousness, Isa. li. 1. It noteth their constant trade and study. It may be rendered pursuers of righteousness, as in the text, pursuers of mischief. They that follow after righteousness are such as continue constant in the serious and sedulous practice of holiness ; and they that follow after mischief are such as are unwearied in the prosecution of their malicious designs. It implieth a metaphor taken from the vehemency of huntsmen in the pursuit of their foe or prey. So Prov. xxi. 21, 'He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life ;' and Heb. xii. 14, *διώκετε τὴν εἰρήνην*, 'Follow peace and holiness ;' as Asahel pursued Abner, 2 Sam. ii. 19, 'And turned not to the right hand or to the left from following after Abner.' The Septuagint renders here *καταδιώκοντές με ἀνομίᾳ*, 'They earnestly seek to undo me.'

2. From the providence of God, who permitteth malicious enemies to draw nigh to his people, and to have many advantages against his people for holy and righteous ends.

[1.] That this is the usual course of God's providence, to suffer his people to be reduced to great dangers and extremities, that there is not a hair-breadth between them and ruin. Paul was in the very mouth of the lion, 2 Tim. iv. 17, before God delivered him ; by the lion he meaneth Nero, a bitter enemy to the Christians, and the lamb was brought bound to him : the prey was in the lion's mouth before God delivered him, 2 Cor. i. 10, compared with 1 Cor. xv. 32, and both with Acts. xiv. 19 : I gave my self for dead ; it was a thousand to one he had not been sacrificed to the fury of the multitude. So was David often near taking dangers, which he did or could hardly escape : Ps. liv., the title, 'When the Ziphims discovered him to Saul.' So Ps. lvii., the title, 'When he fled from Saul in the cave ;' the army of Saul at the mouth of the cave, and Saul cometh into it, and yet God blinded him so that he escaped. So the church : Ps. exxiv. 1-3, 'If it had not been the Lord that was on our side, now may Israel say, if it had not been the Lord who was on our side when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick when their wrath was kindled against us.' They were in the midst of their fears.

[2.] Why is this his usual course ?

(1.) To exercise their trust and dependence. Graces are seldom exercised to the life till we are near the point of death. Now rather than God will suffer his people to live by sense, without manifesting grace, and bringing honour to their profession and the truth of his promises, he will cast them into great dangers. The skill of a pilot is seen in a storm, so is faith put to it in great conflicts ; as it is in cares, so in fears : many are reduced to great straits in the family, no meal in the barrel, no oil in the cruse : John vi. 4-6, 'When Jesus then lift up his eyes and saw a great multitude come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat ?'

And this he said to prove him, for he himself knew what he would do.' A poor believer is put to it : children increase, trading seemeth dead ; what shall we do ? When danger is danger indeed, then is a believer tried and exercised : 2 Cor. i. 9, ' But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.' We are much given to self-confidence ; while our mountain standeth strong, and we are entrenched within the security of worldly advantages and props, we scarce know what faith and dependence upon God mean. Now, saith God, I will make you trust in me ere I have done, and to live alone upon my all-sufficiency : you may think your reputation will bear you out, but I will load you with censures that you may trust in me ; you think friends shall help you, but friend and lover shall be afar off ; you think to shelter yourselves under common refuges, but they shall all fail and cease, that I may see whether you trust in me ; or that the common justice and equity of your cause shall bear you out, but I will send against you those that are maliciously resolved (contrary to all justice and gratitude), that shall approach and endeavour to mischief you. Who would think that Paul should be in danger of self-confidence, a man so exercised as he was, so tossed to and fro, so often whipped, scourged, exposed to danger ? Alas ! we can hardly see with other eyes than nature hath, or depend upon invisible help ; we look at present things, and laugh at danger upon the confidence of outward probabilities. If we can get a carnal pillow and bolster under our heads, we sleep and dream many a golden dream of ease and safety. Now God, that is jealous of our trust, will not let us alone, and therefore will put us upon sharp trials. It is not faith but sense we live upon before : that is faith if we can depend upon God when they draw near that follow after mischief : Ps. iii. 6, ' I will not be afraid of ten thousands of the people that set themselves against me round about.' A danger at a distance is but imagined ; it worketh otherwise when it is at hand : Christ himself had other thoughts of approaching danger than danger at a distance : John xii. 27, ' Now is my soul troubled ;' this vessel of pure water was shaken, though he discovered no dregs.

(2.) To quicken to prayer. Jonah, that slept in the ship, falls a-praying in the whale's belly. A drowsy soul is awakened in case of extreme danger : Ps. cxxx. 1, ' Out of the depths have I cried unto thee.' Now an ordinary prayer will not serve the turn ; not to speak a prayer, but to cry a prayer : we do but act devotion before, and personate the part of the supplicant ; then we exercise it. Now rather than God's children shall neglect prayer, he exposeth them to great hazards : Mat. viii. 25, ' Master, carest thou not that we perish ?' What careless, dead, and drowsy prayers do we perform when all things go on fairly, and we are well at ease ! Moses cried when Israel was at a loss, Exod. xiv. 15, the sea before, the Egyptians behind ready to tread upon their heels, mountains on each side.

(3.) That the deliverance of his people may be more glorious ; partly because there is more of his power and care discovered when our straits are great : ' Israel may now say, We had been swallowed up quick,' Ps. cxxiv. Rescues in extremity of dangers are more glorious :

Ps. cxviii. 13, 'Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall, but the Lord helped me.' So Ps. xxvii. 2, 'When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.' In great dangers to be overtaken by his enemies. God doth some way suffer his people to be brought near destruction, but he doth always prove their friend and helper. David's strength and courage was seen in that he plucked a lamb out of the lion's mouth, 1 Sam. xvii. 34, 35. And partly because these great straits and troubles are a means to open our eyes, and waken our stupid senses. Deliverance is all one to God, whether from great exigencies or in ordinary cases, but is more endeared by extremity of danger. It is as easy to save a hundred or a thousand, but it maketh a fuller sound: we are more sensible of our weakness to help ourselves, to be sure, without his assistance.

Use 1. Be not offended if God cast you into great dangers; it is no argument of God's hatred to destroy you, but of his love to try you, and to prepare you for the greater comfort, that we may have a more glorious sight of his salvation. Many, after confidence expressed, have been put to great trials. The three children were delivered, but put into the fire first, and the furnace made seven times hotter. Paul's company suffered shipwreck before the promise of their safety could be fulfilled. Moses and the Israelites were delivered, yet pursued and shut up, the Egyptians behind, and the seas before, and steep mountains on each side: Ps. cxviii. 18, 'The Lord hath chastened me sore, but he hath not given me over to death.' Things at the worst begin to change; though it come to such a desperate pass as it must be speedy help or speedy ruin, such exigencies do mightily conduce to the glory of God, and the bettering of his people. Whatever weakeneth our confidence, the greatness of danger should not, for in such cases God is there.

Use 2. Let us use the more prayer; it is a time to put promises in suit: 2 Chron. xx. 12, 'O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are unto thee.' The fittest season to treat with God about help; for when the creatures are at a loss, that is the time for God to help. When danger is near, call upon God for help, acquaint him with it, it is time for him to be near also. Ver. 151 of this psalm, 'Thou art near, O Lord.' The less help of man's mercy, the more hope of God's help.

Use 3. The greater the danger, the more thankfully should we acknowledge the deliverance. The woman of Sarepta, when her son was restored to life, 1 Kings from the 17th verse to the end, said, 'By this I know thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.' So Israel may now say, 'If the Lord had not been on our side, men had swallowed us quick.'

Secondly, A description of those from whom this danger was feared, 'They are far from thy law;' that is, they do not regard it. This clause may be added—

1. To amplify or aggravate the danger. As if he had said, Lord, having oppressed them, they condemn thy law, and all restraints of conscience and duty. The farther the enemies of the godly are from

God's law, the nearer to do mischief. So Ps. liv. 3, 'Oppressors seek after my soul; they have not set God before them.' So Ps. lxxxvi. 1, 'Violent men have sought after my soul, they have not set thee before them.' They are likely to be cruel, because profane. When the fear of God is laid aside, and all respect to his word, there is nothing to be expected but the worst of evils. They mind not thy law, therefore care not what mischief they do me.

2. To increase his confidence of help; for God will not favour a corrupt party: Ps. cxxxix. 19, 'Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God;' Ps. xciv. 10, 'The throne of wickedness hath no fellowship with thee.'

Doct. The iniquity of persecutors is some matter of confidence to the oppressed; as David, from those that drew near to mischief him, conceiveth some encouragement because they were far from God's law. There are several considerations:—

1. Usually the servants of God have been most hated and troubled by the worst of men; so it usually falls out that the worst and most virulent enemies of religion are those that are infamous for other crimes. They have the greatest pique against them because they cannot endure the righteousness of God's image on them: Ps. xxxviii. 20, 'They are my adversaries, because I follow the thing that good is.' So John vii. 7, 'The world cannot hate you, but me it hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil.'

2. You may take notice of this wickedness, and represent it so to God; for he is the judge of the world, and it concerneth him to cut short their power to do mischief that have such a ready principle to act it, and are likely to have no other restraints than God layeth upon them by his providence and the interest of their affairs. But of this before, about aggravating the danger.

3. When we do so, be sure the thing be true, that they are not only injurious to us, but open enemies to God and godliness, before we speak thus of those that hate us, or work any trouble to us in the world. As long as the cause will admit of a favourable construction, we should take heed of such suggestions. I observe this the rather, because man is so partial to himself, that whosoever are enemies to him, he presently thinketh they are enemies to godliness; and therefore, when we pass our judgment on any person and cause, it had need be conformed to truth; for otherwise it argueth great irreverence towards God to make him conscious to our revenges and private passions, Ps. cxxxix. 21–24. We had need try our cause, when God's quarrel and our interest are joined, that there be not some dregs of private spleen and rash censurings mixed therewith, and that passion doth not rule us, but duty, in these complaints, and that it is not our own interest, but God's quarrel, they being open enemies to him. And therefore we must be confident that such as we pray against are in a wicked condition, and engaged in an evil course.

4. When this is clear, there is some comfort and confidence in the badness of our enemies.

[1.] Because God and we are engaged in a common cause, for our adversaries are against God as well as against us. Now it is better to be afflicted by them than to have fellowship with the unfruitful

works of darkness, or to cry up a confederacy with them that cry up a confederacy against God, Ps. cxxxix. 22.

[2.] It is a great satisfaction to us to be opposed by evil men, or common enemies of the power of godliness. Certainly it would be more grievous to us to be oppressed by them that have a show of godliness than the openly profane, Ps. lv. 12, 13. The worst that a professed enemy can do is more tolerable than the injury of a friend. It importeth a dishonour to be opposed by the good, as having an ill cause in hand, or unworthy to be assisted; but it helpeth to make the cause more clear when we see what kind of persons we have to do withal, such as we cannot but count wicked, because they have no regard to God's law. Our cause would not be so clear if it were with them that fear God.

[3.] The more wicked they are, the more ripe for judgment; especially if they be a corrupt party in the visible church; for where we perceive wickedness to reign, there we may be sure destruction will follow.

Use. Well, then, whenever this falleth out, mind God of it, and be not discouraged. An ill cause will not always prevail. Only let us be prepared for deliverance, as they are ripe for destruction, otherwise none so bad but good enough to make a rod to scourge God's children. And then have patience; such are our enemies as are God's also; they are far from obedience to God's law.

SERMON CLXIX.

Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth.—

VER. 151.

In the former verse, the enemies are represented as near, and near to do mischief, but far from the law of God. Here in the text there is somewhat put in opposition to both.

1. For their nearness to do mischief, God is near to help.

2. They are far off from the law. The man of God asserteth that God's commandments are truth. All their contempt of the law did not abate and lessen his esteem of it. So that the sum of the verse is, that the enemies cannot be so ready to hurt as God is to help and deliver; they cannot go about to defeat promises as God will go about to fulfil them. Mark, he compareth the readiness of wicked men to hurt with the readiness of God, their contempt of the word with the truth of the word, or God's justification of it. In short, in the verse we may observe two branches:—

1. Something spoken of God.

2. Something of his law.

1. That which is spoken of God is, that he is near, a present help to those that persist in the obedience of his will; for nearness doth not only import his favour, or inclination to help them, but that he will not delay his help too long; his help is at hand, therefore called 'A present help in trouble,' Ps. xlii. 1, and 'The Lord is at my right hand,'

Ps. xvi. 8; ready as our second in all conflicts to stand by us, support and comfort us in our troubles, yea, to deliver us; that is the notion of nearness in the text. Near as the enemies are near, only he is near to defend as they are near to destroy. When to appearance danger is nearest, at the same time help and salvation is nearest also, and this doth allay all our cares and fears: Phil. iv. 5, 6, 'The Lord is at hand, therefore be careful for nothing.' Still present by his providence, or hastening his second coming: Rev. xxii. 20, 'I come quickly.' I rather quote that place, for the Septuagint hath it here ἐγγὺς εἶ, κύριε, there ὁ κύριος ἐγγὺς, therefore he bids us be careful for nothing; certainly the belief of God's nearness should encourage us.

2. That which is said of his word and law is, 'Thy commandments are truth.' One would think it had been more proper to say, are just and righteous, than to say are truth. His commandments are just as the rule of our duty, they are just as the rule of God's process; but the word commandment is not taken strictly for the mandatory part of the word, but it is put for the whole covenant, his precepts invested with promises and threatenings. The commandments thus considered, with the promises and threatenings annexed, are true. Yea, mark the emphasis of the phrase, truth itself. The happiness promised to them that make conscience of their duty will be made good; and so the punishments on them that offend God will be inflicted. Now the joining of these two clauses seemeth to speak thus much: I know that thou art near me, because thy word is truth. God in his providence seemeth to be absent sometimes from his people, but upon the assurance of his word we must believe him near. I say, God seemeth to be far off from his people, for who would think that the God of peace and all comfort should dwell with them that are broken in spirit? Isa. lvii. 15, 'For thus saith the high and holy One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' Or that the author of all felicity should be present with them that are harassed and exercised with such sharp afflictions, and hunted up and down in the world, but because God hath promised it: Isa. xliii. 2, 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.' We should be satisfied with it; his word is truth: whatever sense and reason saith to the contrary, neither distance of place nor afflictedness of condition do hinder his nearness to us.

Quitting all other points, I shall only insist on this one.

Doct. That it is the privilege and happiness of God's children to have God near unto them upon all occasions.

My great business will be to explain what this nearness is, and then you will soon find it to be the great happiness and privilege of the saints.

1. What is this nearness?

2. How is it brought about?

First, What is this nearness?

1. God is not said to be nearer to them than others in regard of his essence, for so he is everywhere present, *nullibi inclusus, nullibi ex-*

clusus. So a heathen described God to be a great circle, whose centre is nowhere, and circumference everywhere; and in the prophet he telleth us, Jer. xxiii. 23, 24, 'Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? do not I fill heaven and earth? can any hide him in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord.' He filleth all things with his essential presence; he is in earth, in heaven, and under the earth: Ps. cxxxix. 7, 8, 'Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? and whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there: if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.' God is here, and there, and everywhere; the heavens do not confine and enclose his being, nor the tumults of the earth exclude it: in this sense God is alike near to all things. They that cannot endure the presence and thought of God, where will they go from him? They may run away from God as a friend, but they cannot escape him as an enemy. *Te non amittit nisi qui dimittit, et qui te dimittit, quo fugit, nisi a te placato ad te iratum?* Men may shut God out of their hearts, and yet he is there, do what they can, and will be found there one day in the dreadful effects of his anger.

2. Not in regard of his general providence and common sustentation; for so οὐ μακρὰν, 'He is not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being,' Acts xvii. 27, 28. 'This general presence and providential sustentation is vouchsafed to all his creatures, without which they could not subsist, nor move, nor act; so all things are enclosed under the hand of his power, and are still under his disposing.

3. It is meant of his friendly and gracious presence, and those eminent and gracious effects of his power and goodness which he is pleased to afford his people. So God is sometimes said to be nigh unto his people, and they are said to be a people near unto him. The Lord is said to be near unto them: Ps. xxxiv. 18, 'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart;' and again, Ps. cxlv. 18, 'The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, and to all that call upon him in truth;' Deut. iv. 7, 'What nation is so great? who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?' The Lord is said to be nigh, because he is always ready to hear their prayers, and to direct them in their doubts, comfort them in their sorrows, defend and protect them in all their dangers, and deliver them in all their troubles. On the other side, they are said to be a people near unto God: Ps. cxlviii. 14, 'He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints, even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him.' Because they are the special objects of his mercy and favour. And as to the actual intercourse that passeth between God and them, God is said to draw nigh to them, as they are said to draw nigh to God: James iv. 8, 'Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you;' and so drawing nigh to us on God's part signifieth grace and blessing; and drawing nigh on our part, our duty, love, fear, delight, and reverence of God. Well, then, it is meant of his friendly gracious presence vouchsafed to his people.

4. This nearness may be understood of his visible presence in his

ordinances, or of that spiritual inwardness and saving union and communion that is between God and his converted people, or those that are brought home to him by Christ, and are the members of his mystical body. In some sense it is the privilege of the visible church to have God near them, because they have the signs of his presence among them; as in the former place, Deut. iv. 7, 'What nation hath God so nigh unto them?' It was the common privilege of the nation, in comparison of the pagans about them, who were a people afar off, and strangers to the covenants of promise. So Jer. xiv. 9, 'Thou, O Lord God, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not.' Thus God is said to be nigh because he dwelleth in the churches and walketh in the midst of them; but those that are converted indeed are in a straiter union with God. All those that are members of the visible church, and are united to Christ by a visible and political union, they have great privileges, for they are a society under God's special care and government, and enjoy the means of grace and the offers of salvation, and great helps by the gifts bestowed upon the body, and so have God nearer to them than others, though they have not the saving fruits of union with Christ and communion with God. Once more, a people that are nigh unto God visibly and politically may be cast off; as Jer. xiii. 11, 'For as a girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory; but they would not hear;' 'yet I will cast them away as a rotten girdle that is good for nothing,' ver. 10. These words are the application of a charge given to Jeremiah, to get him a girdle, and hide it till it was rotten, and then to bring it forth and tell the people the meaning of this ceremony. He was to get a girdle, not leathern, nor woollen, such as were commonly worn by the ordinary sort; but a linen girdle, such as the better sort of persons were wont to wear. He was not to wet it, or put it in water, to imply that neither God nor aught from him had been the cause of the general corruption and destruction of this people; but to hide it in a dry place near Euphrates till it was corrupted. Thus God would lay visibly before their eyes their own state; they were as near about him, girded as close to him, as a girdle about a man's loins, yet then good for nothing. But for those to whom God is near by saving benefits they cannot be lost, for where the nearness is really begun, it will continue, and never be broken off. You may as well separate the heaven and the dough, *impossibile est massam a pasta separare*, &c.

5. In those that are living members of Christ's mystical body we must distinguish between a state of nearness and acts of nearness. By converting grace we are brought into a state of nearness unto God, and in worship we actually draw nigh unto him, and he to us. The state of nearness is the state of favour and reconciliation with God into which we are admitted who were before strangers and enemies: Col. i. 21, 'And you, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.' And also our participation of the divine nature: 2 Peter i. 4, 'Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you

might be partakers of the divine nature; having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust; or life of God, from which we were formerly alienated by sin: Eph. iv. 18, 'Having their understandings darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.' For these three do always go together, the favour of God, the image of God, and fellowship with God. When Adam lost one, he lost all: when he lost the image of God, he also lost the favour of God, or fellowship with God, or nearness to him. So then our state of nearness lieth in the recovery of the favour of God, and the image or life of God, when we stand right in his grace, and live his life: they are both great mercies, and both the ground of our fellowship with God, or nearness to him. O Christians! think with yourselves. Is it not a great privilege for poor sinful creatures, that could not think of God without horror, or hear him named without trembling, or pray to him without great dejection of heart, to look upon God as reconciled, and willing to receive us and bless us! So for the life of God, to have a life begun in us by the Spirit of God, and maintained by the continual influences of his grace, till all be perfected in glory, what a privilege is this! None but they that live this life can have communion with God. Things cannot converse that do not live the same life; as Adam had no companion or help-meet, but was alone, though all the creatures came and subjected themselves to him, trees, beasts, men, &c.: Gen. ii. 18, 'And the Lord said, It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him an help-meet for him.' But besides this state of nearness, there are special acts of nearness, both on God's part and ours; he is nearer to us sometimes than at others, when we have more evidences of his favour inward or outward: inward evidences, when he quickens, comforts, supports the soul, filleth the heart with joy and peace in believing; at such a time God is near, we feel him sensibly exciting and stirring up his own work in us. The soul always dwelleth in the body, but it doth not always act alike; it is ever equal in point of habitation, but not in point of operation. So Christ doth always dwell in the heart by his Spirit, but he doth not always act alike, but *κατ' εὐδοκίαν*, 'according to his good pleasure,' Phil. ii. 13. God is not alike always present with his people, but never withdraweth that influence that is necessary to the being of grace: Ps. lxxiii. 23, 'Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.' So outwardly; sometimes God hideth himself, sometimes seemeth not to mind the affairs of his people, at other times all the world shall know that they are near and dear to him: he that toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye: those that will not see, shall see and be ashamed for their envy at his people, Isa. xxvi. 11. So on our part there is a standing relation between us and God, but our hearts are more or less towards him in worship; we especially then draw near unto him, though there be a communion in walking with God in our whole course. These things must be distinguished, for actual intercourse may be interrupted or suspended, when our state of nearness to God ceaseth not.

6. The grounds and reasons of all nearness, or the way how it cometh about, are these four:—

- [1.] God's covenant with us.
- [2.] Our incorporation into Christ.
- [3.] The inhabitation of the Spirit in us.
- [4.] Mutual love between God and us.

These are the reasons why God is near us, and we a people near unto God.

[1.] His covenant with us, or confederation in the covenant. God promiseth to be our God, and we to be his people: Jer. xxxii. 38, 'And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.' As those two kings made a league offensive and defensive, 1 Kings xxii. 4, 'I am as thou art, and my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses;' so God will be ours as really as we are his; you shall have a propriety in God, as God has in you; not absolutely indeed the same, but enough for your comfort. You were his before the contract, and to be at his command; but he is not at your command: you may supplicate and humbly sue out the effects of your right in God, and may be sure of speeding, when it is for his glory and your good. We have a right to God, and all that is in God, but not a right over him, as he hath over us. We have propriety and interest in God, but not dominion, as we have over the creatures, or as God hath over us. He will let out his goodness, grace, and mercy to us and for us. God still keepeth the rank of a sovereign, and yet treateth us as friends: James ii. 23, 'Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God.' Yea, children: John i. 12, 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.' When we give up ourselves to God to serve him, we enter ourselves heirs to all the privileges of the gospel, and may lay claim to them.

[2.] By union with Christ; such as are under the covenant of grace are made members of the mystical body of Christ. This union the scripture sets forth by the similitude of head and members: Rom. xii. 5, 'So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.' Vine and branches: John xv. 1, 2, 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman; every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.' Stock and graff, Rom. vi. 5; body and garment: Gal. iii. 27, 'For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.' The converting of meat and drink into our substance: John vi. 56, 'He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.' House and indweller: Eph. iii. 17, 'That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.' As the members receive sense and motion from the head, the branches sap from the root, and the graff liveth in the stock, so we receive all life and being from Christ. Christ first giveth himself to us, and with himself all things. We must have himself first, for it is he in us becometh the fountain of life: Gal. ii. 20, 'I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' The hope of glory: Col. i. 27, 'Christ in you the hope of glory.' Now this endeareth us to God, and makes us near to him: John xvii. 21, 'That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that

they also may be one in us.' Christ is God-man in one person, and we are united to him mystically, though not hypostatically; and so God and we are brought near together. For we are in him as he is in the Father, not with an exact equality, but some answerable likeness; we are immediately united to Christ, and by Christ to God.

[3.] The inhabitation of the Spirit, that is the fruits of union, as union of confederation. The same spirit that dwelleth in Christ dwelleth in us: 1 Cor. vi. 17, 'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.' It is by the same spirit that the union is brought about, the same spirit that dwelleth in head and members; this is the foundation laid on Christ's part for all our communion and commerce with God: 1 John iv. 13, 'Hereby we know that we dwell in God, and God in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.' We cannot know our communion with God as the author of grace by any other gift; he maketh his first entry this way, uniting us to himself by his Spirit.

[4.] The mutual love between God and them. God loveth them, and they love God; and so they are near and dear to one another: 1 Sam. xviii. 1, 'The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.' Such love is here between Christ and believers, and between them and God. God beginneth, he loveth first, and best, and most; no father or mother loveth their children so tenderly as God doth them: Isa. xlix. 15, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.' No husband loves his spouse as Christ doth the church: Eph. v. 25, 'Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;' not only gave himself to the church, but for it. Alas! when we are at our best, we love God too little. There is a strong love which the saints have to God and Christ; they cannot live without him, are always crying, Abba, Father: Gal. iv. 6, 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.' They cannot brook his absence, are dejected if they cannot hear from him at every turn.

7. There being such a ground laid for our nearness, all familiar intercourses do pass freely between God and us, through Christ, by whom and through whom are all things, and we by him, 1 Cor. viii. 5. Our commerce with God is in donatives and duties.

[1.] On God's part, it is seen in his readiness to hear our prayers: Isa. lviii. 9, 'Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am.' God is at hand; when we knock at heaven's gates, he answereth presently, saying, And what would you have? If God should make an offer to us as Jonathan did to David, 1 Sam. xx. 14, 'Whatever thy soul desireth, I will do for thee,' we would think then we should never want more. What would the world give for such a promise from an earthly potentate? You have it from God, if you like the condition: Ps. xxxvii. 4, 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart.' Thou canst not desire anything regularly, and consisting with the condition of the covenant, with thy delight in God, but thou shalt have it. In a holy sense, you have God at command, to do for you

what you would have, as if you had his sovereignty at command : Job xxii. 27, 28, 'Thou shalt make thy prayers unto him, and he shall hear thee ; and thou shalt pay thy vows. Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee ; and the light shall shine upon thy ways.' Decree, and it shall be established ; speak the word, and it shall come to pass. Is it for us to enact decrees, to appoint what shall be ? Their prayer is a duplicate or counterpart of God's decrees. God guideth their hearts to ask such things as are pleasing to him ; God is ready to help us, to give supplies in all our necessities ; he is remembering us for good upon all occasions, especially in our low estate ; when we have none to help, he will help : Isa. lix. 16, 'And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor : therefore his arm brought salvation unto him, and his righteousness it sustained him.' It was when he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey ; he cannot be safe unless he be wicked ; and none will bestir himself in the behalf of truth and right, or own the good cause, by speaking a word for it ; therefore God himself would take the business in hand : Ps. cv. 14, 'He suffered no man to do them wrong.' They that are God's confederates, he hath a watchful eye over them ; they are under his defence and protection. An afflicted people are more sensible of God's presence, help, and assistance than others are ; for straits and troubles are means to open men's eyes and waken their senses. Now you will ever find God with you when he seemeth most to forget you. But especially in duties of worship, the visits of love there, and the entertainment at God's table : Ps. lxxv. 4, 'Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach to thee, that he may dwell in thy courts : we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.' They have many sweet experiences of God, which they find not elsewhere ; there he doth comfort, quicken, and revive them.' Ps. xxxvi. 8, 'They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house ; thou shalt make them drink of the rivers of thy pleasures.' God biddeth them welcome to this table, and will not send them away empty ; indeed, there they come to feel joys unspeakable and glorious. Not that we should build always on sensible experiences, or tie God to our time, or make an essay of curiosity ; but if they humbly, resolutely wait upon God according to the encouragements of his promise, first or last they shall have a full meal, and God will own them, and fill their hearts with goodness. Thus in answering their prayers, helping them in straits, visiting in duties.

[2.] On our part, it is delightful to converse with God—

(1.) In holy duties : Isa. xxvi. 16, 'Lord, in trouble have they visited thee ; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them ;' Job xxii. 21, 'Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace ; thereby good shall come unto thee.' We have no reason to be strange to God, for if we were acquainted with ourselves, we should find daily and hourly some errand to the throne of grace. To forget him days without number sheweth we have little knowledge of God or of ourselves. Be sure to look after a desire to enjoy God in the duty : 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of my God ; my flesh and my heart crieth out for the living God,' Ps. lxxxiv. 2, 3.

To rest in an empty ordinance sheweth we do what we do rather to pacify conscience than satisfy spiritual desires. God is to be our end and object, whom we are to seek and serve; *abs te sine te non recedam*.

(2.) In a course of holiness: 'How can two walk together except they be agreed?' Amos iii. 3. Loveth what he loveth, hateth what he hateth. Suitableness of disposition is the ground of intimacy: 1 John i. 7, 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.' God saith, I will dwell in them, and walk in them. Walk as ever before God: Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.'

Secondly, How we come to be brought into this nearness? The reason of doubting is because every man is born a stranger to God: Ps. lviii. 3, 'The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.' Sin causes a distance between God and us: Isa. lix. 2, 'But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.' Man is averse from God, without God, Christ, covenant, or hope of any good from him. Christ represents our apostate nature by the prodigal's going into a far country; the breach groweth wider every day, and the distance is increased by actual sin. The wicked are far from God: Hosea vii. 13, 'Woe unto them, for they have fled from me; destruction unto them, for they have transgressed against me.' While matters stand thus between us and God, there is no hope; the rigour of divine justice and the terror of a guilty conscience will not give us leave to look for any communion with God.

Ans. In this hopeless and helpless estate the Lord Jesus had pity on us. The great end of the mediator is to bring us to God: 1 Peter iii. 18, 'For Christ hath once suffered for sins; the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.' And therefore he is said to be the way to the Father: John xvii. 6, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.' He hath taken our case into his own hands, and doth, partly by his merit and partly by his Spirit, bring about this nearness and fellowship between God and us.

1. By his merit he bringeth us into a state of favour; he opened the door by his death: Eph. ii. 13, 'But now in Christ Jesus we who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.' To go to God offended, and appeased by no satisfaction, is terrible to the guilty creature; but Christ hath made our peace, so that we have access into this grace wherein we stand: Rom. v. 1, 2, 'Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into the grace wherein we stand.' This door which he hath opened by his death, he keepeth open by his constant intercession: Heb. vii. 25, 'Wherefore he is able to save unto the uttermost all those that come unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us;' which our repeated provocations would otherwise daily and hourly shut and close again: 1 John ii. 1, 'These things I write unto you, that you sin not: and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;' and so all distance is removed, and poor creatures may comfortably come to God.

2. There is a great averseness in our hearts, and we need not only leave to come to God, but a heart to come to God. We are fugitives as well as exiles; we hang off from God, and are loath to make use of the offered opportunity; therefore the imprecation of our liberty is not only to be considered, but also the application of this grace to our souls, which is done by the Spirit of Christ. Certainly, as to God, he considereth us as united to Christ before he will be near to us: Eph. ii. 13, 'But now in Christ Jesus ye, who were sometimes afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.' It was purchased by the blood of Christ, but it is not actually bestowed and applied to the elect until they be united to Christ, and in him by saving faith, as branches in the root; not only through Christ, but in Christ: something for us, and something in us as to ourselves; overcome our averseness to set our hearts to seek the Lord. *Nemo te quærere potest nisi qui prius invenerit; vis igitur inveniri ut quæraris? quare, ut inveniaris; potes quidem inveniri, non tamen preveniri.* None can be aforehand with God; we cannot seek him till we have found him. He will be sought that he may be found; and found that he may be sought. He draweth nigh to us by his preventing grace, that he may draw nigh to us by further grace; and inclineth us to do what he requireth, that he may crown his own work.

Use 1. To persuade us to enter into this state of nearness by taking hold of God's covenant. It is an excellent thing in the general; all will grant that it is good to draw near to God; but it is not only good, but good for you, all things considered: Ps. lxxiii. 28, 'It is good for me to draw near to God;' it is our only blessedness. The practical judgment must be possessed with this truth, and then determine it so that it may have the authority of a principle; and then the heart must be engaged to draw nigh to God by a hearty resolution to come unto God. Till the heart be engaged, we are too easily enticed away from God. Now the engaging the heart is by covenant: 'Yield yourselves to the Lord,' 2 Chron. xxx. 8. All God's servants, they are his by covenant: Ezek. xx. 37, 'I will cause you to pass under the rod, and bring you into the bond of the covenant;' as sheep, to pass one by one out of the fold. God doth not covenant with us in the lump and body, but every man for himself must engage himself to live according to the will of God. It is not enough that Christ engaged for us as our surety: Heb. vii. 22, 'Jesus was made the surety of a better testament;' something is to be done personally if we would have benefit by it. It is not enough that the church engage for us as a visible political body professing faith in Christ, Ezek. xvi. 7; but every man must engage his own heart. It is not enough our parents did engage for us, in behalf of little ones, avouch God to be their God: Deut. xxix. 10-12, 'Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of wood to the drawer of thy water; that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day.' We must ratify their dedication and covenant in our own persons, 2 Cor. ix. 13, by a professed subjection to the gospel of Christ; this cove-

nant and oath of allegiance. You eat at God's table to show that God and you are agreed, and entered into a strict union and fellowship one with another.

2. Let us live as in a state of nearness to God ; let us fear him, and love him, and walk with him, as Enoch did, Gen. v. 24 ; or set the Lord always before us, as David did, Ps. xvi. 8. How so ? In point of reverence, in point of dependence.

[1.] In point of reverence, that we may not displease God with whom we walk : Micah vi. 8, ' Walk humbly with thy God.' Thou shalt humble thyself to walk with God. It is not a fellow-like familiarity or the intimacy of equals, but the common subjection of inferiors, the obedience of children, diligently taking heed lest a breach fall out betwixt God and them : Deut. xxiii. 14, ' For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thee, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee ; therefore shall thy camp be holy, that he may see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee.' God threatens to leave them if he saw any filthiness among them. If we sin against God, we may find him near as a judge to punish, not as a father to protect us. Besides it is for the honour of God that a people near and dear to him should study to please him in all things, and that they should walk worthy of God, with whom they profess to be in covenant, and whose friendly presence they enjoy. The nearer you are to God the greater your sins. If you be the spouse of Christ, your sins are adultery ; if you be the children of God, your sins are rebellion and parricide ; if you be the friends of God, Christ hath the more cause to complain : Ps. lv. 12, 13, ' For it was not an enemy that reproached me ; then I could have borne it : neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me ; then I would have hid myself from him : but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance.' Your sins are the injuries of a false friend, if you be of the household of God. After you had eaten his bread, will you lift up the heel against him ? Ps. xli. 9, ' Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lift up his heel against me.' It is treachery of an unfaithful domestic and servant. Men will endure injuries from strangers better than from nearer relations. Those that do not belong to God, that are not so dear and near to him, their sins are not so grievous. In short, if you be the people of God, whom God will own in the world, you should take care to live to his honour.

[2.] In point of dependence, did we believe more firmly that God was so near and so ready at hand, to comfort, support, deliver, and bless us, this would stay our hearts in all our troubles. Is God near us ? What should we be afraid of ? Ps. xxiii. 1, 2, ' The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures : he leadeth me beside the still waters.' God admitteth you to his table to assure you of his bounty and liberality ; he gives you this support as a sign of reconciliation with you, that God and you are friends. Now τὰ τῶν φίλων πάντα κοινὰ. Especially let it check our fears ; when trouble is near, God is also near, to counterwork our enemies and support his people : Zech. iii. 1, 2, ' And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and

Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, 'The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' Where there is Satan to resist, there is an angel to rebuke; as extremities draw nigh, God draweth nigh. When Laban with great fury followed after Jacob, God followed after Laban, and stepped between, and commanded Laban not to hurt him. When Paul was like to be torn in pieces in an uproar, God runneth speedily to his help: 2 Cor. i. 9, 10, 'But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead; who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' When danger cometh to be danger indeed, you will find him a present help.

Use 2. To quicken us and encourage us actually to draw nigh to God with the more confidence; that is, let us address ourselves to converse with him in his ordinances, for his favour, mercy, and blessing, that we may not stand afar off, but come boldly. To this end, consider whither we come, by whom we come, in what manner we must come or draw nigh to him.

1. To whom we draw near; to God, as reconciled in Christ. If God were inaccessible it were another matter; but divine justice being satisfied in Christ we come to a throne of grace: Heb. iv. 16, 'Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.' God's throne is a throne of justice, grace, glory. To the throne of strict justice no sinful man can approach; to the throne of grace every penitent sinner may have access; to the throne of glory no mortal man can come in his whole person; his heart may be there: so it is said, Heb. x. 19, 'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,' as petitioners are admitted to the prince in the presence chamber. The way to the throne of glory lieth by the throne of grace; we pass by one unto the other. In short, Christ stood before the throne of justice when he suffered for our sins; penitent sinners stand before the throne of grace when they worship him in faith. After the resurrection we shall ever stand before the throne of glory, and ever abide in his presence. Our business now is with the throne of grace, to give answer and despatch our suits. There is a threefold throne of grace—the typical, which was the mercy-seat: Ps. lxxx. 1, 'Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth;' the real, which is Christ: 'Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;' the commemorative, which is the Lord's supper, where is a representation of wisdom and oblation of the grace of Christ in the New Testament. This throne of grace is set up everywhere in the church; it standeth in the midst of God's people, as the tabernacle did in the midst of Israel; for God is always in all places nigh unto such as call upon him in truth: John iv. 23, 'The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.' Access to God may be had everywhere, therefore let us come.

2. By whom we come; by Jesus Christ: Eph. iii. 12, 'In whom we

have boldness, and access with confidence, by the faith of him ;' upon account of his merit and intercession. We should come without fear or doubt to him, *de facto*, as if his blood were running afresh.

3. How we come ; with a true heart : Heb. x. 22, ' Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having a heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.'

SERMON CLXX.

Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.—VER. 152.

IN this verse is a further illustration of the last clause of the former. He had said there, ' Thy commandments are *ipsissima veritas* ;' now he amplifieth that saying from God's ordination and appointment, ' Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.' The prophet ends this octonary and paragraph with some triumph of faith ; and after all his conflicts and requests to God, goeth away with this assurance, that God's word should be infallibly accomplished, as being upon his own experience of unchangeable and unerring certainty. Two things you may observe in the words :—

1. The constant and eternal verity of God's testimonies, *thou hast founded them for ever.*

2. David's attestation to it, *I have known of old* that it is so. What the word of God is in itself ; and then what is the opinion of the believer concerning it.

First, What the scriptures are in themselves.

1. For their nature ; they are God's testimonies, or the significations of his will.

2. For their stability ; they are founded (there is a great emphasis in that word), and that by God, ' Thou hast founded them.'

3. For their duration, and everlasting use ; in that word ' for ever,' of an eternal use and comfort.

Secondly, David's attestation or persuasion of this, ' I have known of old.'

I here observe—

1. His persuasion.

2. The date and standing of his persuasion ; it was ancient, ' I have known of old.'

1. His persuasion, ' I have known.' There is a twofold knowledge—the knowledge of faith, and the knowledge of sense ; both agree with the words.

[1.] The knowledge of faith : ' I know that my Redeemer lives,' that is, I believe it ; what we read concerning thy testimonies. Other translations read, by thy testimonies : ' I have known by thy testimonies.' The Septuagint, *ἔγνων ἐκ τῶν μαρτυρίων σου*, have been persuaded of this by thy Spirit out of the word itself.

[2.] The knowledge of sense and experience: I myself have known by sundry experiences heretofore, which I shall never forget.

2. The date and ancientness of this persuasion, 'of old.' It was not a late persuasion, or a thing that he was now to learn. He always knew it since he knew anything of God, that God had owned his word as the constant rule of his proceedings with creatures, in that God had so often made good his word to him, not only by present and late, but old and ancient experiences. Well, then, David's persuasion of the truth and unchangeableness of the word was not a sudden humour, or a present fit, or a persuasion of a few days' standing, but he was confirmed in it by long experience. One or two experiences had been no trial of the truth of the word, they might seem but a good hit; but his word ever proveth true, not once or twice, but always. What we say 'of old,' the Septuagint reads, *κατ' ἀρχάς*, 'from the beginnings,' that is, either—

[1.] From my tender years. Timothy knew the scriptures from a child, 2 Tim. iii. 15; so David very young was acquainted with God and his truth.

[2.] Or from the first time that he began to be serious, or to mind the word in good earnest, or to be a student either in God's word or works, by comparing providences and promises, he found, concerning his testimonies, that God had founded them for ever.

[3.] Lastly, 'of old,' may be what I have heard of all foregoing ages, their experience as well as mine: Ps. xxii. 4, 5, 'Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them; they cried unto thee, and were delivered; they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.'

The points are three:—

Doct. 1. There is an everlasting stability, and a constant unchangeable truth in God's testimonies.

Doct. 2. This must be known by us, or apprehended by us.

Doct. 3. Experiences of former times should give us encouragement to trust God for what is future.

Doct. 1. There is an everlasting stability and a constant unchangeable truth in God's testimonies.

Proof. Ps. cxi. 8, 'All his commandments are sure; they stand fast for ever and ever.' The word of God is of perpetual use and comfort, not in one condition, but in all; in every age of the world you have the effects of it: it shall be made good to us in the world to come: 2 Cor. i. 20, 'For all the promises of God in him are Yea, and in him Amen;' of one invariable tenor, and of a sure and certain accomplishment. They do not say Yea and Nay, but Yea and Amen; Yea to our hopes, and Amen to our desires.

Reasons. It must needs be so, if we consider—

1. Their author.

2. Their foundation.

3. Their use.

First, Their author is God, who is the self-same God, and needs not say and unsay; for he has wisdom enough to foresee all events; power enough to answer all difficulties that may stand in the way of his promises; authority supreme, and so is above all controlment.

Sometimes men command, but without reason; sometimes they promise, but without performance; sometimes they threaten, but without effect: therefore the word of man dieth and may come to nothing; they forget their promises, or may be cast into such circumstances as to be unable to perform them: but these are God's testimonies, and therefore are pillars that cannot be shaken; they are laid by God himself, who hath ordained them to stand firm for ever. His people shall find more in his performance than they could perceive in his promise, and his enemies shall find more weight in his judgments than they could apprehend in his threatenings: 2 Tim. ii. 19, 'The foundation of God standeth sure;' *θημελία*, his obligation, not a foundation in the builder's sense, but in the lawyer's sense. His obligation or bill of contract, that is, his promise or covenant with us in Christ, remaineth unchangeable. A bill or bond is called *θημελία*. God will own his servants if they will be faithful to him. See Hammond.

Secondly, They are founded; the testimonies of God, if taken for the promises of the gospel, as they ought to be, are built on two foundations:—

1. One foundation is the unchangeableness of God's nature: Heb. vi. 18, 'That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation.' God cannot change, cannot lie. God can no more break his promise than cease to be God; his love, truth, power, is all unchangeable.

2. The other foundation is the blood of Christ; in him they are Yea and Amen. The things promised are purchased with a great price; surely that blood was not shed in vain: 'Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ,' 1 Cor. iii. 11.

Thirdly, Their use.

1. To be testimonies or declarations of God's mind and will to the creature; not only for the regulation of our actions, but the measure of God's dealings. God's covenant in respect of the commands is the rule of man's duty; in respect of the promises and threatenings, they are the rule of God's judgment or process with us. Now, it is for the honour of God and satisfaction of man that this should be stated and held good in all ages and cases; therefore God hath established a process and rule of dealing with his creatures that shall never be changed. If your cause will hold good according to God's testimonies, it will hold good before his tribunal. Otherwise we could not know certainly that we do please or maintain any commerce with him, or know what to expect from him.

2. To be props and pillars of our confidence; so the scriptures, as they are founded themselves, so they are a foundation for us to build upon: Eph. ii. 20, 'And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone;' they support the weight of the building. Now, foundation-stones must not be movable, or laid loosely and carelessly, for then all the building will be weak and tottering; therefore there is a sure word and sure promises for poor creatures to build upon. The apostle calls it *βεβαίον-τερον λόγον*, 2 Peter i. 19, 'A more sure word of prophecy,' comparing it to the voice from heaven, whereof he spoke immediately before. We are upon more certain terms, now God guideth us by scripture,

than if he guided us by oracle: *quoad nos*, it is so, though every declaration of God be alike evident and certain in itself. A transient voice is more easily mistaken and forgotten than a standing authentic record. Consider it as subject to jealousies, forgetfulness, mistakes; it is so. The general voice of the gospel gives more encouragement to self-undoing sinners than a voice from heaven calling us by name.

Use 1. To humble us for our uncertainty and inconstancy, when the testimonies of God are so stable and unchangeable. The scriptures are as firm as a rock; but, alas! we are unstable as water, both as to faith and obedience. There should be a proportion *inter regulam et regulatum*, between the rule and the thing ruled, the measure and what is measured, the stamp and the impression. We carry it so as if the word spake one thing to-day, and another to-morrow; as if God would sometimes maintain the cause of his people, and at other times forsake them; as if he sometimes loved sin, and hated righteousness; would sometimes be good to penitent sinners, at other times turn away from them. We profess to walk by his rule, and yet live so disproportionable.

1. In faith, like waves of the sea rolled hither and thither, our dependence and trust now and anon changing with the posture of our affairs, not suited to the eternal verity of the promises. In crosses, confusions, and difficulties, we are at an utter loss: James i. 6, 'But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.' If we believe it to-day, why not to-morrow? Do difficulties abate anything of the certainty of God's word, and make it questionable? Then it would be in the power of man to disannul the promise, and God could never lay a sure ground of hope.

2. In obedience. The weakness of our faith and dependence necessarily inferreth that they that do not trust God cannot be long true to him: James i. 8, *δίψυχος ἀκατάστατος*, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' Sometimes when we are soul-sick, we mourn and complain of sin, and seem to have a passionate hatred of sin; at other times, when the fit is over, we give it harbour and entertainment, and embrace our Delilah again; whereas the same reasons that once made us hate sin should still make us hate it, for sin is sin still. The scripture doth not one while condemn it, and another while allow it; but we are not swayed by our rule, but act as we are inclined by our changeable affections, and therefore complain of sin to-day, and commit it to-morrow, and lick up our vomit again. So for duty: Hosea vi. 4, 'Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it passeth away.' Nothing so fickle and changeable as man in anything that is good, so vain and inconstant are we in our motions and devotion; pangs that can no more endure a trial than the morning cloud and early dew can endure the heat of the rising sun; it cometh by fits.

3. In our opinions and professions, how do we say and unsay, and build again the things we have destroyed, and destroy the things we have builded; so that we know not where to have them, and are like children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine! Eph. iv. 14, where are two metaphors; they are compared to children for inconstancy in their choice, and to ships destitute of

skilful masters, tossed this way and that way with contrary winds and tides. So they with divers doctrines and opinions. Sometimes taken with one opinion, sometimes with another; *περιφερόμενοι*, circled about by all the winds in the card. Is this becoming the constant unerring certainty of the scriptures? It will be necessary for us to quit this childish temper; God will not always bear with it in us, whatever he may do in babes; therefore let us not receive the truth of God lightly and uncertainly, but fix ourselves in the knowledge, the love, and practice of the truths that are there commended to us: Gal. i. 6, 'I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel.' This lightness is a disease incident to our natures, soon off, soon on; that other gospelling, or pretence of a purer way.

Use 2. Is comfort to the people of God—

1. In all the particular changes that pass over our heads. Our estate and condition is many times changed, but God's word is no more changed than himself is changed; all things shall come to ruin sooner than these foundations be overturned: Mat. v. 18, 'Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.' The promises are still the same, even as God is: Mal. iii. 6, 'For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.' And these mercies we should take comfort in: Heb. xii. 28, 'Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.' So also 1 John ii. 17, 'And the world passeth away, and the lusts thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

2. In times of general confusion, when that which they apprehended to be right and a duty proveth a sin, when wickedness is established by a law: Ps. xciv. 20, 'Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?' and all that is just and right seemeth to be perverted. There is a God in heaven, who will judge not according to the opinions of the times, but according to the reality of things revealed in his holy word. These ordinances of men shall be forced to give way to those eternal testimonies; a duty in former times, a sin now.

3. Comfort against the encounters of violence, when we seem to be borne down with force, and have no hope. The testimonies of God are firm and steadfast, that none shall overthrow and frustrate them. They are but as the dashing of waves against a rock: Isa. xxviii. 15, 'When the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us.'

4. It is a comfort in prayer; so David useth it here. Yea and Amen, that relateth to our desires, as before.

Use 3. To persuade us to behave ourselves to the word of God as an unchangeable unerring rule.

1. To the directions and precepts of it. There are no other terms to be expected, but what God hath set down in the word; therefore frame yourselves to observe them, and be constant in this practice, then will you have the everlasting comfort of it. Bind them upon your hearts: you must take up Christ's yoke one time or other;

do not think that he will alter the ordinances of his wisdom and justice for your sakes: Ps. cxix. 66, 'Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I have believed thy commandments.'

2. To the promises of it. They are founded for ever, whatever carnal reason suggests to the contrary in the hour of temptation. To this end consider what promises are. They are declarations of the purposes of God. Both confirm you. As they are purposes of God, they imply immutability: Heb. vi. 17, 'Wherein God, willing to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it with an oath.' God's counsel is immutable, for God being an intelligent agent, of most perfect knowledge and profound wisdom, can will and determine nothing but according to the best and most exact understanding. There can be no cause of revocation, either for want of wisdom or justice, for he is absolutely both wise and just; nor from inconstancy of will, for 'the strength of Israel is not as man that he should repent;' nor can his will be frustrated for want of power, for he is almighty. But now when this purpose is declared, that draweth on a further obligation: Ps. lxxxix. 34, 'I will not alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.' There is a debt ariseth, and a right established of the creatures. To change counsel would imply weakness; to alter a promise, wickedness and unfaithfulness, which were the highest blasphemy to imagine in God, especially when this declaration is made with such emphatic averment, confirmed by an oath: Heb. vi. 18, 'That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we may have strong consolation;' which is such a sacred assurance, yea, by seals and signs. Yet, again, your very believing bindeth it the faster: Ps. cxix. 49, 'Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.' Would God invite a trust, and then decline it? The more you believe, the sooner you see the effects of the promise. This is the difference between promises and threatenings. Christ saith, 'Be it unto thee according to thy faith.' God's threatenings are fulfilled whether man will or no; let him believe or not believe, God will throw the ungodly into hell. But in promises it is otherwise; then they do good to us when by faith we embrace them; believe, and thou shalt be established. Besides God's two immutable things, faith is an anchor sure and steadfast, Heb. vi. 19; therefore let us not entertain the promises of the gospel with a loose heart; you may know it by your slowness and carelessness about them, if you do not esteem them as great: 2 Peter i. 4, 'To you are given exceeding great and precious promises;' they contain spiritual and eternal riches, and deserve to be greatly esteemed. By your addictedness to sense and to present things you seem to declare that you think a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush, happiness to come but conjectural and uncertain. It is a fancy to live by faith, if it doth not support us in difficulties and afflictions: Ps. cxix. 40, 'This is my comfort in my affliction, thy word hath quickened me;' when you look on all the promises as a dry stick, or as words and wind; if they do not engage us to the earnest pursuit of heavenly happiness, and the blessedness which they contain and offer: Heb. xi. 13, 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and

were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.'

Doct. 2. That this unchangeable certainty and everlasting verity of God's testimonies should be known by us, that so a sure word should be entertained by a pure faith. David acknowledgeth here his own certainty.

1. What it is to know this. To know signifieth three things—to understand, to consider, to believe; all have place in this point. There must be a clear apprehension, a deep and serious consideration, and a firm assent and sound belief of this truth.

[1.] It is needful we should understand the unchangeable and everlasting verity of the scriptures; for how shall we believe what we do not know, and venture our souls upon what we are ignorant of? 2 Tim. i. 12, 'I know whom I have believed;' John ix. 36, 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God? And he said, Who is he, that I might believe on him?' True faith is not content to go on implicit grounds, but seeks for clear knowledge of the ground it goeth upon. Nor can there be solid faith without knowledge of that which we do believe. Who will venture his soul on the bottom of the scriptures till he knoweth they are of God, and unchangeably fixed as the rule of life and charter of his happiness, especially since they require us to crucify our lusts, and sacrifice our interests, and perform those duties which are displeasing to nature, upon the hopes which they offer, and bid us with confidence and joyfulness to wait upon God for his salvation in the midst of all pressures and afflictions. If we build hand-over-head we build on the sand, not on the rock.

[2.] To know signifieth to consider. This is also necessary, because all knowledge is improved by consideration, without which it is but as ignorance or oblivion at the best, till consideration doth awaken it. Certainly it can have no efficacy upon us, breed no delight and hope in us. A transient view doth not acquaint us with things as serious meditation; the truth lieth by unimproved; as a man that passeth us by occasionally knoweth us not so much as he that doth intimately converse with us. Therefore, if we would improve our knowledge, excite the soul to its act of faith and choice, there must be consideration. We are bid to consider the Lord Jesus, Heb. iii. 1; to give heed to the gospel, Heb. ii. 1, to consider its worth and certainty. The schoolmen have a distinction, *certitudo cognitionis seu speculationis*, and *certitudo adhesionis*; the former lieth only in a clearness of the mind, the last in its power upon the affections and the will. The object rightly propounded produceth the former from the understanding, not expecting the consent of the will; the latter followeth *imperium et consensum voluntatis*, the command and consent of the will. The former ariseth from the evidence of the thing; the latter from the worth, weight, and greatness of the thing, the gospel truth. Of this latter sort we read, 1 Tim. i. 15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief;' and therefore must not only be apprehended, but seriously considered by us, that we may adhere to it with all our hearts. Though illumination is helped by contemplation, yet much more the latter, where firm adherence is expected. Men may apprehend the truth of things, when corrupt

affections and a perverse will keep them from closing with them ; but when a man so knows a thing as to consider it both his duty and interest to close with the goodness and truth of it, then doth he rightly know it.

[3.] To know signifieth assent and firm believing ; as John xvii. 8, ‘ They have known surely, ἀληθῶς, that I came out from thee.’ So Acts ii. 36, ‘ Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, ἀσφαλῶς, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye crucified both Lord and Christ ;’ to know it so as they might safely build upon it. This is mainly necessary, considering the many temptations and assaults that we shall meet with to shake us ; this assent must be very strong, well rooted and built upon sure ground. And because it doth not consist *in puncto*, it must be always growing, Mark ix. 24, ‘ Lord, I believe ; help thou my unbelief ;’ till it grow up to the certainty of the thing on which it is built. There is an objective certainty in things that is beyond that subjective certainty in persons about them ; but because it is built on divine revelation, or God’s testimonies, we should still increase in it.

2. Whence we know it, there is the difficulty. The doubt will not lie here, whether God’s testimonies be of everlasting verity, but how we shall know them to be God’s testimonies. For it is *per se notum*, that God is true, that he cannot lie, or give a false testimony : 1 John v. 9, ‘ If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.’ But how doth it appear this is God’s testimony ? for that word that is propounded to be believed as such, cannot be perceived easily, neither is it known of itself to the understanding, neither is it demonstrable by evident reasons as to make infallible conclusions. The word’s giving testimony of itself doth not solve it ; indeed one part may give testimony to another, and one revelation be confirmed by another, as the New Testament giveth witness to the Old, and confirmeth its authority ; but how shall we know that to be God’s testimony ? I answer, we have it—

[1.] Partly from the self-evidencing light of the scriptures themselves ; they have passed God’s hand, and have his signature upon them, as all his works make out their author. There are characters of his wisdom, power, goodness, and holiness impressed upon them : 2 Cor. iv. 2–4, ‘ By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God : but if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost : in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.’ The gospel being the result of God’s wisdom, and suited to the heart of man, for whose use it was calculated, it hath something in itself to commend it to our consciences. It cannot be imagined that the hand of God should pass upon anything, and there should be nothing of his character left on it to show it came from God. Look upon any fly or guat, any flower of the field or pile of grass, and you may see some impressions to discover the author of them. So certainly if God shall set himself to write a book, or set forth a frame of doctrine to do man good, surely he hath discovered his wisdom and holiness and grace therein, and that in plain and legible characters, that, if

man were not prepossessed and leavened with prejudice and corrupt affections, he could not choose but see it. That there is such an objective evidence or aptitude in the doctrine itself to beget faith in those that consider it, is plain from that of the apostle: 2 Cor. iv. 2-4, 'By the manifestation of the truth we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God;' without miracle, or other confirmation, if they had a clear eye: it is light which discovereth itself, and all things else. The reason why it is not seen is not in the object, because of any defect there, but the faculty, the visive faculty; their eyes are blinded with worldly lusts. Well, then, when things are spoken so becoming the nature of God, and so agreeable to the necessities of man, and with such an evidence of reason, not to the law only, but also to the gospel, as to establishing of a way of commerce between God and us, and exempting us from the grand scruples that haunt us, though these things could not be found out by human wit, yet now they are revealed, they carry a great suitableness thereunto.

[2.] And partly by the testimony of the Spirit, this is one way of confirming the truth of the gospel: Acts v. 32, 'We are his witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him;' where the apostles are mentioned as one sort of witnesses, and the Holy Ghost as another. The great office of the Spirit is to testify of Christ Jesus: John xv. 26, 'Even the spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.' The doctrine of the gospel concerning Christ's coming and power is so great a mystery that it is not believed and received in the world without the Spirit. Upon the beginning of Christ's ministry, in his baptism, the Spirit appeared in the form of a dove. Now the Holy Ghost doth two ways bear witness of Christ—*ἐν τεχνῶς, ἀτεχνῶς*, artificially, and inartificially. Artificially, *per modum argumenti*; and inartificially, *per modum testis*; partly as he doth afford sufficient matter of confirmation and conviction in those miraculous operations in the primitive times, and also as he doth persuade the heart, and convince us of the truth of the gospel.

[3.] There is experience of the truth of the word in God's hearing prayers: Ps. lxxv. 2, 'O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.' Fulfilling promises: Ps. xviii. 30, 'Thy word is a tried word; he is a buckler to all that trust in him.' Punishing the wicked: Hosea vii. 12, 'I will chastise them as their congregation hath heard.' Rewarding according to the rules set down in the word, Rom. i. 18, and Heb. ii. 3; but of this by and by.

3. Why we must understand, consider, and believe?

Ans. Both in order to our comfort and duty.

[1.] Comfort. If the certainty of the scriptures were more understood, believed, and thought of, we should be more fortified against fears and sorrows, and cares and discouragements, whencesoever they do arise; for as fire well kindled doth easily break forth into a flame, so assent freely laid doth fortify the heart against trouble. It is very notable when the apostles would raise the joy of faith, they plead the certainty of the doctrine they delivered; for it was comfortable in itself, suitable to the necessities of man; all that needed was to assure

others of the truth of it—see 1 John i. 1-4—that their joy might be complete and full, upon this certainty of evidence, and complete demonstration. We could not be so comfortless and dejected, if we were persuaded of the reality of these things. So 2 Peter i. 8, ‘Believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorious.’ We should love Christ, and rejoice in the believing confident expectation of enjoying of him. And where this is firmly believed, afflictions cannot damp or hinder this joy. A firm trust in the promises of the word will fill a man with comfort, and strengthen him against all difficulties, Ps. lvi. 4-10.

[2.] Our obedience would be better promoted, it would be a remedy against boldness in sinning and coldness in duty: Heb. iii. 12, ‘Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.’ You cannot drive a dull ass into the fire: Prov. i. 17, ‘Surely in vain is the net laid in the sight of any bird.’ Men do not believe the everlasting verity of the scriptures, and therefore are so bold and venturous; they think they shall do well enough after all God’s threatenings: Zeph. i. 12, ‘And it shall come to pass that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and will punish the men that are settled upon their lees, that say in their hearts, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.’ Secondly, coldness in duty. How do the scriptures reason against neglect? Heb. ii. 1-3, ‘Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip; for if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and every disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?’ The word spoken by angels was λόγος βέβαιος. Was only worth questioned? No; but the truth also, because so little believed, therefore so little thought of, less desired, least of all pursued and sought after: 2 Peter i. 16, ‘We have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of the Lord Jesus, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.’

Use. Oh! study to be informed more and more of this great truth. Let us think of and often consider the unerring certainty of the scriptures. It is a truth not to be supposed and taken for granted, but known, that you may build sure. Man is apt to suspect evangelical truths, as being cross to his lusts and interests. You will find it of use, not only in great temptations, when we are apt to question all, Ps. lxxiii. 13, but in ordinary practice, in every prayer: Heb. x. 22, ‘Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.’ It is not an assurance of our particular estate, or our title to eternal life, but a full assurance of the word and promise of God, that is necessarily required in every one that will draw nigh to God: ‘Let us ask in faith, nothing doubting,’ James i. 7, 8.

2. Do not content yourselves with a light credulity, but grow up to a full persuasion: 2 Tim. iii. 14, ‘But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;’ and Col. ii. 2, ‘That their hearts being comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding;’ not a fluctuating doubting knowledge,

but a full persuasion of the truth of the gospel : Luke i. 4, 'That thou mayest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed;' Col. i. 23, 'If thou continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel;' a rooted persuasion that it is the undoubted truth of God : the firmness of faith should answer the firmness of God's word. There are several degrees of assent, conjecture, opinion, weak faith, and receiving the word in much assurance, 1 Thes. i. 6. There is belief, confidence, assurance, and full assurance. Belief is grounded on God's word in general, and all the truths and propositions therein contained. Confidence, on the promise; the one goeth before the other : fidelity is before dependence and belief; for the promise is first a truth, and so to be considered, before it can be conceived under the formal notion of a promise. Full assurance is grounded on the fidelity and immutability of God; no man believeth so far but he may believe more.

Doct. 2. That experiences of former times should give us encouragement to trust God for what is future. 'Thy testimonies I have known of old,' saith David.

So the children of God make use of them. See David's instance, 1 Sam. xvii. 36, 'Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them. Moreover David said, The Lord hath delivered me from the paw of the lion, and the paw of the bear, and he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.' Thus he argueth from former experience to future deliverance : I trust in the same God, who is able to give the same strength, and why should I not look for the same success? So Jacob : Gen. xxxii. 10, 11, 'I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of the truth thou hast showed to thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands : deliver me, I pray thee, from the hands of my brother Esau.' So Ps. xxiii. 5, 6, 'Thou hast prepared a table for me in the presence of mine enemies : surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.' He hath been good to me, and if it be for his glory, he will be still good to me; he hath been my God, and will be my God, and shall be my God for ever : 2 Cor. i. 10, 'Who hath delivered from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust he will yet deliver us.' In all respects of time we stand in need of deliverance; when one is past, another cometh; there have been dangers, there are dangers, and there will be dangers; but God hath, doth, and will deliver. It is a trade God hath used, an art he is versed in, and never at a loss about. Our God is a God of salvation, and is excellent in working of it.

Reasons of the point.

1. God's constancy and unchangeableness. God is the same, always like himself, for mercy, power, and truth; he is never at a loss : what he hath done, he can do, and will do. I am, is God's name, not I have been, or shall be. His providence is new and fresh every morning, Lam. iii. 23. God is but one God, Gal. iii. 20; always like himself. As he hath delivered, so he doth, and will : Isa. lix. 1. 'Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened that he cannot save, neither his ear heavy that he cannot hear.' No decay in him. When we give

to another, we give from ourselves ; we waste by giving. The creatures are at a stint, and soon spend their allowance ; but God cannot be exhausted ; there is no decrease of love and power, no wrinkle upon the brow of eternity.

2. Experience begets confidence : Rom. v. 3, ‘And patience experience, and experience begets hope.’ The heart is much confirmed when it hath faith and experience of his side. If we were as we should be, the promise should be beyond all experiences, for it is the word of him that cannot lie. Experience addeth nothing to the certainty of the promise, nor any authority to it ; only in regard of our weakness, it is a help and sensible confirmation against our distrustful cares and fears. Sense and experience is not the ground of faith. We must believe God upon his bare word ; yet it is an encouragement : John xx. 29, ‘Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed.’ Then more encouraged when Christ felt. We have a double proof and experience :—

[1.] What God is able to do for us.

[2.] What God will do again, when his own glory and our need requireth it.

[1.] We know what God can do ; former deliverances are as so many monuments and significations of his power : Isa. li. 9, ‘Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord ; art not thou he that cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon ? awake, and put on strength, as in the ancient days.’ Rahab is Egypt, Ps. lxxxvii. 4 ; the dragon, Pharaoh, Ezek. xxix. 3, the dragon or crocodile of Egypt. Can he do this, and not do that ? Upon every experience, we that learn by sense should be more strongly persuaded of God’s power. It is a complaint they will not learn after all these signs and wonders : Mat. xvi. 9, ‘Do ye not understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up ?’ Upon every experience we should have high thoughts of God’s power and all-sufficiency. The great controversy between Christ and his disciples was their not profiting in faith.

[2.] We see and know what God is willing to do for poor sinners. He is not sparing of necessary supplies and comforts ; he hath been a present help. We have no cause to believe the contrary ; it is only distrust saith he will not ; it is a suspicion and jealousy without cause. It may be, for it hath been : 1 Sam. xvii. 36, ‘The Lord hath delivered me,’ &c. Particular and special confidence is not so usual now, but we have no reason to be discouraged in the ways of God ; though we cannot be absolutely confident, yet we should not balk duty out of distrust and jealousy. In such faintings take the cordial of experience : Ps. lxxxvii. 10, ‘And I said, This is my infirmity ; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.’

3. Former mercies are pledges of future ; by giving, God becometh our debtor : Mat. vi. 25, ‘Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment ?’ If he gives life, he will give food ; if he gives a body, he will give raiment : one mercy is an earnest of another. Rom. viii. 32, if he give us Christ, he will give us all things ; if he give grace, he will give glory ; if we have the first-fruits, Rom. viii. 23, we shall have the harvest ; if we have the beginning, Phil. i. 6, we shall have the ending. There are some dispensations that are but

as a tendency to other mercies, given out in such a way as to invite hope.

4. We are the more endeared to God by his own mercy and tender care of us : Zech. iii. 2, 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the burning?' The danger heightens the mercy.

Use 1. To reprove the people of God for their diffidence and distrust, when, after many experiences of God, they can no more quiet their hearts concerning future events; upon every new trouble as much tormented and perplexed as if never known nor heard anything of God before. David : 1 Sam. xxvii. 1, 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.' When God hath abundantly done enough to evidence his power and love unto his : Ps. lxxviii. 19-21, 'They said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?' &c. When we are to credit God in another work, as the disciples after the miracle of the loaves. When new temptations assault us, we should not be disheartened. What were God's motives before to help? Because you were in misery; the same you may expect again.

Use 2. To press you—

1. To observe your experiences, and compare them with the word. All that God doth is full of truth and faithfulness : Ps. xxi. 7, 'The works of his hands are verity and judgment, all his commandments are sure;' exactly according to what he hath promised; they certainly come to pass. Especially observe your experiences in your troubles and temptations, what hath been your greatest comfort and support then.

2. Begin to do so betimes; long experience is a great advantage. Most Christians are to be blamed that they begin so late to know God, or to observe the truth of his word, or that adjourn and put it off. Fruits planted late are seldom ripe and come to anything. When we have a long journey to go, we set forth early. Begin with the Lord betimes, if you would thrive in faith. The longer experience you have had of God, the more you will believe in him : Ps. xxii. 9, 10, 'Thou art he that took me out of the womb; thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breast: I was cast upon thee from the womb; thou art my God from my mother's belly.'

3. Remember and improve experiences. 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee.' Let not new troubles startle us, after we have found the power and goodness of God so ready for our help.

SERMON CLXXI.

Consider mine affliction, and deliver me; for I do not forget thy law.—VER. 153.

In this verse observe—

1. David's petition, *consider mine affliction, and deliver me.*

2. His argument, *for I do not forget thy law.*

First, His petition is double—for pity and deliverance; the one is preparative to the other.

1. That God would consider his case.