

(First published in the edition of the “Expository Works”,
in two volumes, and printed for David Wilson, Edinburgh, 1748.)

EXPOSITORY LECTURES

ON

PSALM XXXIX

by

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LECTURE I.

Ver. 1. I said I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.

CERTAINLY it is a high dignity that is conferred upon man, that he may as freely and frequently as he will, converse with Him who made him, the great King of Heaven and Earth. It is, indeed, a wonder, that God should honour poor creatures so much; but it is no less strange, that men having so great privileges, the most part of them do use them so little. Seldom do we come to Him in times of ease. And when we are spurred to it by afflictions and pains, commonly we try all other means rather than this, which is the alone true and unfailing comfort. But such as have learned this way of laying their pained head and heart in His bosom, they are truly happy, though in the world’s language they be never so miserable.

This is the resource of this holy man in the time of his affliction, whatever it was,—prayer and tears, bemoaning himself before his God and Father, and that the more fervently, in that he finds his speaking to men so unprofitable; and therefore he refrains from it.

The Psalm consists of two parts, his silence to men, and his speech to God; and both of them are set with such sweet notes of music, though they be sad, that they deserve well to be committed *To the Chief Musician*.

I said I will take heed to my ways.] It was to himself that he said it; and it is impossible for any other to prove a good or a wise man, without much of this kind of speech to himself. It is one of the most excellent and distinguishing faculties of a reasonable creature; much beyond vocal speech, for in that, some birds may imitate us; but neither bird nor beast have any thing of this kind of language, of reflecting or discoursing with itself. It is a wonderful brutality in the greatest part of men, who are so little conversant in this kind of speech, being framed and disposed for it, and which is not only of itself excellent, but of continual use and advantage; but it is a common evil among men, to go abroad, and out of themselves, which is a madness and a true distraction. It is true, a man hath need of a well set mind, when he speaks to himself; for otherwise, he may be worse company to himself than if he were with others. But he ought to endeavour to have a better with him, to call in God to his heart to dwell with him. If thus we did, we should find how sweet this were to speak to ourselves, by now and then intermixing our

speech with discourses unto God. For want of this, the most part not only lose their time in vanity, in their converse abroad with others, but do carry in heaps of that vanity to the stock which is in their own hearts, and do converse with that in secret, which is the greatest and deepest folly in the world.

Other solitary employments, as reading the disputes and controversies that are among men, are things not unuseful; yet, all turns to waste, if we read not our own heart, and study that. This is the study of every holy man, and between this and the consideration of God, he spends his hours and endeavours. Some have recommended the reading of men more than books; but what is in the one, or in both of them, or all the world beside, without this? A man shall find himself out of his proper business, if he acquaint not himself with this, to speak much with God and with himself, concerning the ordering of his own ways.

It is true, it is necessary for some men, in some particular charges and stations, to regard the ways of others; and besides something also there may be of a wise observing of others, to improve the good and the evil we see in them, to our own advantage, and the bettering of our own ways, looking on them to make the repercussion the stronger on ourselves; but except it be out of charity and wisdom, it flows either from uncharitable malice, or else a curious and vain spirit, to look much and narrowly into the ways of others, and to know the manner of living of persons about us, and so to know every thing but ourselves: like travellers, that are well seen in foreign and remote parts, but strangers in the affairs of their own country at home. The check that Christ gave to Peter, is due to such, *What is that to thee? Follow thou me.* John xxi. 22. Look thou to thine own feet, that they be set in the right way. It is a strange thing, that men should lay out their diligence abroad to their loss, when their pains might be bestowed to their advantage nearer at hand, at home within themselves,

This that the Psalmist speaks here of, *taking heed to his ways*, as it imports his present diligence so also it hath in it reflection on his ways past, and these two do mutually assist one another. He shall never regulate his ways before him, who has not wisely considered his ways past; for there is wisdom gathered from the observation of what is gone, to the choosing where to walk in time to come, to see where he is weakest, and lies exposed to the greatest hazard, and there to guard. Thus David expresses it in another Psalm, *I thought on my ways, and turned my fret unto Thy testimonies.* Psa. cxix. 52. And this should be done not only in the great change of one's first conversion from sin, but this double observance must be still continued every day: a man should be looking to his rule, and laying that rule to his way, and observing where the bulk and nonconformity to the rule is, and renewing his repentance for that, and amending it the next day that still the present day may be the better for yesterday's error.

And surely there is much need of this, if we consider how we are encompassed about with hazards, and snares, and a variety of temptations, and how little we have either of strength to overcome, or of wisdom to avoid them, especially they being secretly set and unseen, (which makes them the more dangerous,) every where in the way in which we must walk, and even in those ways where we least think. Every where does the enemy of our souls lay traps, and snares for us; in our table, in our bed, in our company, and alone. If the heart be earthly and carnal,

there is the snare of riches and gains, or pleasures present, to think upon: and if it delight in spiritual things, that walk is not exempted neither; there are snares of doubtings, presumption, and pride. And in the converse of one Christian with another, where spiritual affection hath been stirred, it turns often to carnal passions; as the Apostle says of the Galatians, they *begin in the spirit and end in the flesh*. Gal. iii. 3.

This observing and watching, as it is needful, so it is a very delightful thing, though it will be hard and painful to the unexperienced. To have a man's actions and words continually curbed, so that he cannot speak or do what he would,—these are fetters and bonds; yet, to those that know it, it is a pleasure to gain experience, and to be more skilled in preventing the surprises of our enemies, and upon that to have something added to our own art, and to be more able to resist upon new occasions, and to find ourselves every day outstripping ourselves. That is the sweetest life in the world, for the soul to be dressing itself for the espousals of the Great King, putting on more of the ornaments and beauties of holiness. That is our glory, to *be made conformable to the image of God, and of Jesus Christ*. If an image had sense, it would desire nothing so much as to look on the original whence it received its name, and to become more and more like it: so it is the pleasure of renewed souls, to be looking on Him, and to be growing daily more like Him, whose living image they are, and to be fitting themselves for that day of glory wherein they shall be like Him in the perfection they are capable of. And this makes death more pleasant than life to the Believer: that which seems so bitter to the most of men, is sweetened to them most wonderfully. The continual observance of a man's ways, the keeping a watch continually over them, this casts a light upon the dark passage of death, which is at the end Of that walk, and conveys him through to the fulness of life. So that the man who observes himself and his ways through life, hath little to do in examining 'them when he comes to die. It is a piece of strange folly, that we defer the whole, or a great part of our day's work, to the twilight of the evening, and are so cruel to ourselves; as to keep the great load of our life for a few hours or days, and for a pained, sickly body. He who makes it his daily work to observe his ways, is not astonished when that day comes, which long before was familiar to him every day.

That I sin not with my tongue.] It is the Wise Man's advice, *Keep thy heart with all diligence, or, above all keeping*; and he gives the satisfying reason of it, *For out of it are the issues of life*. Prov. iv. 23. Such as the spring is, so will the streams be. The heart is the spring whence all the natural life and vital spirits flow through the body; and, in the Scripture sense, it is the spring of all our actions and conversation; for it sends out emissaries through all, through the eye, the hand, and all the senses and organs of the body, but through none more constantly and abundantly than the tongue; and therefore Solomon, after these words, immediately adds, *Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee*. The current of the heart runs in that channel; for it is the organ of societies, and is commonly employed in all the converse of men. And we can still, when all the other members are useless, use our tongues in regretting their unfitness for their offices; as sick and old persons are wont to do. Thus David here, as it seems, under some bodily sickness, labours to refrain his tongue, and lest it should prove

too strong for him, he puts a curb upon it: though it did not free him from inward frettings of his heart, yet he lays a restraint upon his tongue, to stay the progress of sin, that grows in vigour by going out, and produces and begets sin of the same kind in the hearts and mouths of others, when it passes from the heart to the tongue. The Apostle James does amply and excellently teach the great importance of ordering the tongue in all a Christian's life. But we are ever learning and never taught. We hear how excellent a guard this is to our lives, to keep a watch over our tongue; but, I fear, few of us gain the real advantage of this rule. We are far from the serious thoughts that a religious person had of this scripture, who, when he heard it read, withdrew himself for many years to the study of this precept, and made very good proficiency in it.

In all the disorders of the world, the tongue hath a great share. To let pass those irruptions of infernal furies, blasphemies and cursing, lying and uncharitable speeches, how much have we to account for unprofitable talking! It is a lamentable thing that there is nothing, for the most part, in common entertainments and societies of men together, but refuse and trash; as if their tongues were given them for no other end than to be their shame, by discovering their folly and weakness! So likewise that of impatient speech in trouble and affliction, which certainly springs from an unmortified spirit, that hath learned nothing of that great lesson of submission to the will of God. But for all the disorders of the tongue, the remedy must begin at the heart. Purge the fountain, and then the streams will be clean. *Keep thy heart*, and then it will be easy to keep thy *tongue*. It is a great help in the quality of speech to abate in the quantity; not to speak rashly, but to ponder what we are going to say. *Set a watch before the door of thy lips*. Psa. cxli. 3. He bids us not build it up like a stone wall, that nothing may go in or come out, but he speaks of a door, which may be sometimes open, oft-times shut, but withal to have a watch standing before it continually. A Christian must labour to have his speech as contracted as can. be in the things of this earth; and even in Divine things, our words should be few and wary. In speaking of the greatest things, it is a great point of wisdom, not to speak much. That is David's resolution, *to keep silence*, especially before the wicked, who came to visit him, probably, when he was sick: while they were there, he held a watch before his lips, to speak nothing of God's hand on him, lest they should have mistaken him. And a man may have some thoughts of Divine things that it were very impertinent to speak out indifferently to all sorts, even of good persons. This is a talkative age, and people contract a faculty to speak much in matters of religion, though their words for the most part be only the productions of their own brain; little of these things in their hearts. Surely, speeches of this kind are as bad as any, when holy things are spoken of with a notional freedom, where there is nothing but empty words. They who take themselves to solitude, choose the best and easiest part, if they have a warrant so to do; for this world is a tempestuous sea, in which there are many rocks, and a great difficulty it is to steer this little helm aright amidst them. However, the Apostle James makes it a great character of a Christian's perfection: *If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man*. Jam. iii. 2. But where is that man? Seeing we find men generally, and most of all ourselves, so far from this, it cannot choose but work this, to stir up ardent desires in us, to be removed

to that blessed society where there shall be never a word amiss, nor a word too much.

LECTURE II.

- ver. 2. I was dumb with silence; I held my peace even from good; and my sorrow was stirred.
3. My heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue.

IT is a very useful and profitable thing, to observe the motions and deportments of the spirits of wise and holy men, in all the various postures and conditions they are in. It is for that purpose they are drawn out to us in the Scriptures. There are some graces that are more proper, and come more in action, in times of ease and prosperity, such as temperance, moderation of mind, humility, and compassion. Others are more proper for times of distress, as faith, fortitude, patience, and resignation. It is very expedient, if not necessary, that affliction have its turns, and frequently, in the lives of the children of God; it is the tempest that gives evidence of the pilot's skill. And as the Lord delighteth in all his works, looks on the frame and conduct of all things with pleasure, so He is delighted to look on this part, on this low sea of troubles, to see His champions meet with hard and pressing trials, such as sometimes do not only make them feel them, but do often make the conflict dubious to them, so that they seem to be almost foiled, yet do they acquit themselves, and come off with honour. It is not the excellency of grace, to be insensible in trouble, (as some philosophers would have their wise men,) but to overcome and be victorious.

Among the rest of this holy man's troubles, this was one, that the wicked did reproach him. This is a sharp arrow that flies thick in the world. It is one of the sharpest stings of poverty, that, as it is pinched with wants at home, so it is met with scorn abroad. It is reckoned among the sharp sufferings of holy men, Heb. xi. 36, that they suffered *bitter mockings*. Now, men commonly return these in the same kind, that is, by the tongue, whereof David is here aware. He refrains himself even *from good*; not only from his just defence, but even from good and pious discourses. We do so easily exceed in our words, that it is better sometimes to be wholly silent, than to speak that which is good: for our good borders so near upon evil, and so easy is the transition from the one to the other, that though we begin to speak of God and good things with a good intention, yet how quickly run we into another channel! Passion and self having stolen in, turn us quite from the first design of our speech. And this chiefly in disputes and debates about religion, wherein, though we begin with zeal for God, yet oft-times in the end, we testify nothing but our own passion; and sometimes we do lie one against another in defence of what we call the truth.

It cannot be denied, that to a holy heart, it is a great violence to be shut up altogether from the speech of God. It burns within, especially in the time of affliction, as was the case of Jeremiah: *Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name: but His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I was weary with forbearing, and could not stay.* Jer. xx. 9. So is it here with David; therefore he breaks out: the fire burns upward, and he

speaks to God.

Let this be our way, when we cannot find ease among men, to seek it in God. He knows the language of His children, and will not mistake it; yea, where there may be somewhat of weakness and distemper, He will bear with it. In all your distresses, in all your moanings, go to Him, pour out your tears to Him. Not only fire, but even water, where it wants a vent, will break upward. These tears drop not in our own lap, but they fall on His, and He hath a bottle to put them in: if ye empty them there, they shall return in wine of strong consolation.

Ver. 4. Now David's request is, *Lord make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is: that I may know how frail I am.* In which he does not desire a response from God about the day of his death, but instruction concerning the frailty and shortness of his life. But did not David know this? Yes, he knew it, and yet he desires to know it. It is very fit we should ask of God that He would make us to know the things that we do know; I mean, that what we know emptily and barely, we may know spiritually and fruitfully, and if there be any measure of this knowledge, that it may increase and grow more. We know that we are sinners, but that knowledge commonly produces nothing but cold, dry, and senseless confusion: but the right knowledge of sin would prick our hearth, and cause us to pour them out before the Lord. We know that Jesus is the Saviour of sinners; it were fit to pray that we might know more of Him, so much of Him as might make us shape and fashion our hearts to His likeness. We know we must die, and that it is no long course to the utmost period of life; yet our hearts are little instructed by this knowledge. How great need have we to pray this prayer with David here, or that with Moses, *Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.* Psa. xc. 12. Did we indeed know and consider how quickly we shall pass from hence, it were not possible for us to cleave so fast to the things of this life, and, as foolish children, to wade in ditches, and fill our laps with mire and dirt; to prefer base earth and flesh to immortality and glory.

That I may know how frail I am.] Most part of men are foolish, inconsiderate creatures, *like unto the very beasts that perish*, Psa. xlix. 12, only they are capable of greater vanity and misery; but, in as irrational a way, they toil on and hurry themselves in a multitude of business, by multitudes of desires, fears, and hopes, and know not whither all tends. But one well advised thought of this one thing would temper them in their hottest pursuits, if they would but think how frail they are, how vain a passing thing, not only these their particular desires and projects are, but they themselves, and their whole life. David prays that he may *know his end*, and his prayer is answered; *Behold, Thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth.* If we were more in requests of this kind, we should receive more speedy and certain answers. If this be our request, to know ourselves, our frailties and vanity, we shall know that our *days are few and evil*, know both the brevity and vanity of them.

Ver. 5. *Thou hast measured out my days as a hand-breadth.* That is one of the shortest measures. We need not long lines to measure our lives by: each one carries a measure about with him, his own hand; that is the longest and fullest measure. It is not so much as a span: that might possibly have been the measure of old age in the infancy of the world, but now it is contracted to a hand-breadth, and

that is the longest. But how many fall short of that! Many attain not to a finger-breadth: multitudes pass from the womb to the grave; and how many end their course within the compass of childhood!

Whether we take this hand-breadth for the fourscore years that is ordinarily the utmost extent of man's life in our days, or the four periods of our age, in which we use to distinguish it, childhood, youth, manhood, and old age, there are great numbers we see take up their lodging ere they come near the last of any of these, and few attain to the outmost border of them. All of his are but a hand-breadth from death, and not so much; for many of us have passed a great part of that hand-breadth already, and we know not how little of it is behind. We use commonly to divide our lives by years, months, weeks, and days, but it is all but one day; there is the morning, noon, afternoon, and evening. *Man is as the grass that springs in the morning.* Psa. xc. 5. As for all the days that are passed of our life, death hath them rather than we, and they are already in its possession. When we look back on them, they appear but as a shadow or dream; and if they be so to us, how much more short are they in the sight of God! So says David here: When I look on Thee and Thy eternity, *mine age is as nothing before Thee.* What is our life, being compared to God, before whom *a thousand years are but as one day!* And it is less,—like *yesterday when it is past*, and that is but a thought! The whole duration of the world is but a point in respect to eternity; and how small a point is the life of man, even in comparison with that!

The brevity of our life is a very useful consideration. From it we may learn patience under all our crosses and troubles; they may be shorter than life, but they can be no longer. There are few whom an affliction hath lain on all the days of their life; but though that were the case, yet a little time, and how quickly is it done! While thou art asleep, there is a cessation of thy trouble; and when awake, bemoaning and weeping for it, and for sin that is the cause of it, in the mean time it is sliding away. In all the bitter blasts that blow on thy face, thou who art a Christian indeed, mayst comfort thyself in the thought of the good lodging that is before thee. To others, it were the greatest comfort, that their afflictions in this life were lengthened out to eternity.

Likewise, this may teach us temperance in those things that are called *the good things of this world.* Though a man had a lease of all the fine things the world can afford for his whole life (which yet never any man that I know of had), what is it? A feigned dream of an hour long. None of those things that it now takes so much delight in, will accompany the cold lump of clay to the grave. Within a little while, those that are married and rejoice, shall be as *if they rejoiced not*, 1 Cor. vii. 29, as if they never had done it; and since they shall be so quickly, a wise man makes little difference, in these things, betwixt their presence and their absence.

This thought should also teach us diligence in our business. We have a short day, and much to do; it were fit to be up early; to *remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth.* And ye that are come to riper years, be advised to lay hold on what remains; ye know not how little it is.

The more you fill yourselves with the things of this life, the less desire you will have after *those rivers of pleasure that are at God's right hand.* These shall never run dry, but all those other things shall be dried up within a little space; at the fur-

theft, when old age and death come, if not sooner. And on the other side, the more we deny ourselves the sensual enjoyments of the present world, we grow the liker to that Divine estate, and are made the surer of it. And I am sure, all will grant that this is a very gainful exchange.

Verily, every man at his best estate is altogether vanity.] It is no wonder that the generality of men are strangers to God, for they are strangers to themselves. The cure of both these evils is from the same hand. He alone can teach us what He is, and what we are ourselves. All know and see that their life is short, and themselves vanity; but this holy man thought it needful to ask the true notion of it from above, and he receives the measure of his life, *Even a hand-breadth*. There is a common imposture among people, to read their fortunes by their hands; but this is true palmistry indeed, to read the shortness of our life upon the palms of our hands.

Our days are not only few, but we ourselves are *vanity*. *Every man*, even a godly man, as he is a partaker of this life, is not exempted from vanity: nay, he knows it better than any other; but this thought comforts him, that he hath begun that life which is above and beyond all vanity. The words are weighty and full. It is not a problem, or a doubtful thing, but, *surely, every man is vanity*. I may call it a definition, and so it is proved, Psa. cxliv. 2, 3: *What is man? He is like to vanity, and his days are as a shadow that passes away*. His days do not only soon decline and pass away as a shadow, but also they are *like vanity*. While he appears to be something, he is nothing but the figure and picture of vanity. He is like it, not the copy of it, but rather the original and idea of it, for he hath derived vanity to the whole creation: he hath *subjected the creatures* to it, and hath thrown such a load of it upon them, that they groan under it; and so, vanity agrees to him properly, constantly, and universally. *Every man*, and that *at his best estate*, or, as the word is, in his settled and fixed state. Set him as sure and as high as you will, yet he is not above that; he carries it about with him as he does his nature.

This is a very profitable truth to think on, though some kind of hearers, even of the better sort, would judge it more profitable to hear of eases of conscience. But this is a great ease of conscience, to consider it well, and carry the impression of it home with you on your hearts,—the extreme vanity of ourselves; that we are nothing but vanity. And the note that is added here, *Selah*, if it import any thing to the sense and confirmation of what it is added to, it agrees well to this; but if it be only a musical note, to direct, as some think, the elevation, or, according to others, the falling of the voice, it fits the sense very well. For you have man here lifted up and cast down again: lifted up—Man *at his best estate*, and from that thrown down to nothing—even in that estate, *Altogether vanity*. What is that? It is, as the word signifies, *an earthly vapour*, and it is generally used to signify things of the least and meanest use, the most empty, airy things. So idols are often called by that name; they are nothing in respect of what is attributed to them by the children of men. And such a thing is man; he seems to be something, and is, indeed, nothing: as it is Psa. lxii. 9: *Men of low degree are vanity*,—possibly that may be granted for a truth, and they pass for such, but he adds—*Men of high degree are a lie*: they promise something, and look bigger like, but they are nothing more, except this, *a lie*; and the greater they are, the louder the lie.

This it is, then, that we should acquaint ourselves with; that man, in this present life, in all the high advantages of it, is an empty, feeble, fading thing. If we look to the frame of man's body, what is he but a muddy wall, *a house of clay, whose foundation is in the dust*? If we look within, there is nothing there but a sink and heap of filth. The body of man is not only subject to fevers, hectics, &c., that make the wall to moulder down, but, take him in his health and strength, what is he but a bag of rottenness? And why should he take delight in his beauty, which is but the appearance of a thing, which a fit of sickness will so easily deface, or the running of a few years spoil the fashion of? A great heat or a cold puts that frame into disorder; a few days' sickness lays him in the dust, or much blood gathered within, gathers fevers and pleurisies, and so destroys that life it should maintain; or a fly, or a crumb of bread may stop his breath, and so end his days.

If we consider men in societies, in cities and towns, often hath the overflowing scourge of famine and pestilence laid them waste; and from these they cannot secure themselves in their greatest plenty and health, but they come on a sudden and unlooked for. If we could see all the parts and persons in a great city at one; how many woes and miseries should we behold there! How many either want bread, or scarcely have it by hard labour! Then, to hear the groans of dying persons, and the sighs and weepings of those about them,—how many of these things are within the walls of great cities at all times! Great palaces cannot keep out death, but it breaks through and enters there, and thither oft-times, the most painful and shameful diseases that are incident to the sons of men, resort. Death by vermin, hath seized on one of the greatest of kings that have ever been in the world. If we look on generals who have commanded the greatest armies, they carry about with them poor frail bodies, as well as others: they may be killed with one small wound, as well as the meanest soldier; and a few days intemperance hath taken some of the most gallant and courageous of them away in the midst of their success. And, sure I am, he who believes and considers the life to come, and looks on this, and sees what it is, makes little account of those things that have so big a sound in the world: the revolutions of states, crowns, kingdoms, cities, towns, how poor, inconsiderable things are they being compared with eternity! And he that looks not on them as such is a *fool*.

LECTURE III.

Ver. 6. Surely every man walketh in a vain anew; surely they are disquieted in vain:
he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.

THERE is a part of our hand-breadth past since we last left this place, and, as we are saying this, we are wearing out some portion of the rest of it. It were well if we considered this, so as to make a better improvement of what remains, than I believe we shall find, upon examining of our ways, we have made of what is past. Let us see if we can gain the space of an hour, that we may be excited to a better management of the latter part of our time, than we have made of the former.

We are all, I think, convinced of the vanity of man, as to his outside, that he is a feeble, weak, poor creature; but we may have hope of somewhat better in that which is the man indeed, his mind and intellectual part. It is true, that that was

originally excellent, and that there is somewhat of a radical excellency still in the soul of man; yet, it is so desperately degenerate, that, naturally, *Man*, even in that consideration, *is altogether vanity*, in all the pieces of him: his mind is but a heap of vanity, nothing there but ignorance, folly, and disorder. And if we think not so, we are the more foolish and ignorant. That which passes with great pomp, under the title of *learning* and *science*, is commonly nothing else than a rhapsody of words and empty terms, which have nothing in them to make known the internal nature of things.

But even those persons who have the improvement of learning and education, who understand the model and government of affairs, who see their defects, and entertain themselves with various shapes of amending and reforming them, even in them, we shall find nothing but a sadder and more serious vanity. It is a tormenting and vexing thing for men to promise to themselves great reformatations and bettering of things. That thought usually deludes the wisest of men: they must at length come to that conclusion of Solomon, after much labour to little purpose, that *crooked things cannot be made straight*. Eccles. i. 15. Yea, many things grow worse by labouring to rectify them; therefore he adds, ver. 18, *And he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow*.

As for knowledge in religion, we see the greatest part of the world lying in gross darkness; and even amongst Christians, how much ignorance of these things: Which appears in this, that there are such swarms and productions of debates and contentions, that they are grown past number. And each party is confident that truth is on his side; and ordinarily the most ignorant and erroneous are the most confident and most imperious in their determinations. Surely it were a great part of our wisdom to free our spirits from these empty fruitless janglings that abound in the Christian world.

It were an endless toil to go through all degrees, professions, and employments of men in the world: we may go through nations, countries, crafts, schools, colleges, courts, camps, councils of state, and parliaments, and find nothing in all these but still more of this trouble and vexation in a finer dress and fashion, *altogether vanity!*

Every man walketh in a vain shew.] His walk is nothing but a going on in continual vanity, adding a new stock of vanity, of his own coining, to what he has already within, and vexation of spirit woven all along in with it. He walks in an image, as the word is; converses with things of no reality, and which have no solidity in them, and he himself has as little. He himself is a walking image, in the midst of these images. They who are taken with the conceit of images and pictures, that is an emblem of their own life, and of all other men's also. Every man's fancy is to himself a gallery of pictures, and there he walks up and down, and considers not how vain these are, and how vain a thing he himself is.

My brethren, they are happy persons, (but few are they in number,) who are truly weaned from all those images and fancies the world dotes so much upon. If many of the children of men would turn their own thoughts backwards in the evening but of one day, what would they find for the most part, but that they have been walking among these pictures, and passing from one vanity to another, and back again to and fro, to as little purpose as the running up and down of children

at their play! He who runs after honour, pleasure, popular esteem—what do you think? Does not that man walk in an image, pursuing after that which hath no other being than what the opinion and fancy of men give to it?—especially the last, which is a thing so fluctuating, uncertain, and inconstant, that while he hath it, he hath nothing? The other image that man follows and worships, is that in the text, that wretched madness of *heaping up riches*. This is the great foolishness and disease especially of old age, that the less way a man has to go, he makes the greater provision for it. When the hands are stiff and fit for no other labour, they are fitted and composed for scraping together. But for what end dost thou take all this pains? If for thyself, a little sober care will do thy turn, if thy desires be sober; and if not so, thy diligence were better bestowed in impairing and diminishing of these; that is the easier way a great deal. And if it be for others, why dost thou take a certain unease to thyself, for the uncertain ease of others? And who these are thou dost not know; may be, such as thou didst never intend them for. It were good we used more easy and undistracting diligence for the increasing of those treasures which we cannot deny are far better, and whosoever hath them may abound therein with increase: he knows well for whom he gathers them; he himself shall possess them through all eternity.

If there were not a hope beyond this life, there were reason for that passionate word in Psa. lxxxix. 47; *Why hast thou made all men in vain?* To what purpose were it for poor wretched man to have been all his days tossed upon the waves of vanity, and then to lie down in the grave, and be no more heard of? But it is not so: he is made capable of a noble and blessed life beyond this; and our forgetfulness of this is the cause of all our misery and vanity here.

It is a great folly to complain of the shortness of our life, and yet to lavish it out so prodigally on trifles and shadows. If it were well managed, it would be sufficient for all we have to do. The only way to live indeed, is to be doing service to God and good to men: this is to live much in a little time. But when we play the fool in mis-spending our time, it may be indeed a sad thought to us, when we find it gone, and we are benighted in the dark so far from our home. But those that have their souls untied from this world and knit to God, they need not complain of the shortness of it, having laid hold on eternal life. For this life is flying away, there is no laying hold on it; and it is no matter how soon it go away; the sooner the better, for to such persons it seems rather to go too slow.

LECTURE IV.

Ver. 7. And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in Thee.

To entertain the minds of men with thoughts of their own vanity, and discourses of their own misery, seems to be sad and unpleasant; but certainly it is not unprofitable, unless it be our own choice to make it so, and that were the greatest vanity and misery of all. Indeed, if there were no help for this *sore evil*, then the common shift were not to be blamed, yea it were to be chosen as the only help in such a desperate case, not to think on it, to forget our misery, and to divert our thoughts from it by all possible means, rather than to increase it, and torment our-

selves by insisting and poring on it; and in that case shallow minds would have the advantage, that could not converse with these sad thoughts, for to *increase this knowledge* were but to *increase sorrow*. But far be it from us thus to determine. There is a hope which is a help to this evil, and this is what this holy man fixes on: *And now, Lord, my hope is in Thee*. Otherwise, it were strange that the most excellent piece of the visible creation should be made subject to the most incurable unhappiness; to feel misery which he cannot shun, and to be tormented with desires that cannot be satisfied. But there is some better expectation for the souls of men, and it is no other than HIMSELF who made them.

The wisest natural men have discoursed of man's vanity, and passionately be-moaned it; but in this they have fallen short, how to remedy it. They have aimed at it, and come near it, but have not been able to work it: they still laboured to be satisfied in themselves. They speak somewhat of reason, but that will not do it; for man being fallen under the curse of God, there is nothing but darkness and folly in himself. The only way to blessedness is by going out of ourselves unto God.

All our discourses, of our own vanity will but further disquiet us, if they do not terminate here, if they do not fix on His eternal happiness, goodness, and verity.

I am persuaded, if many would ask this question; of 'themselves, *What wait I for?* they would puzzle themselves and not find an answer. There are a great many things that men desire and are gaping after, but few seek after one thing chiefly and stayedly: they float up and down, and are carried about without any certain motion, but by fancy and by guess; and no wind can be fair for such persons, who aim at no certain haven.

If we put this question to ourselves, What would I have? it were easy for many to answer—I would have an easy, quiet, peaceable life in this world. So would an ox or a horse. And is that all? May be you would have a greater height of pleasure and honour. But think on this one thing; there is this, one crack and vanity that spoils all these things, that they will not bear you up when you lean to them in times of distress; and besides, when you have them they may be pulled from you, and if not, you must be plucked away from them within a little while. There is much seeming content in the pursuit of these things, but they are lost with greater discontent. It is God's goodness to men to blast all things in the world to them, and to break their fairest hopes, that they may be constrained to look above to Himself: He beats them from all shores, that He may bring them to the Rock that is higher than they. Psa. lxi. 2.

Oh, that God would once touch some of your hearts, who are under the chains of darkness, that ye might once bethink where to rest your heads in the midst of all our confusions. And here is the resting place, hope in God. Now Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in Thee Blessed soul that can say, Lord Thou seest I desire nothing but Thyself, (as Peter said Lord thou knowest I love Thee,) all the corners of my heart stand open in thy sight, Thou seest if there be any other desire or expectation but to please Thee, and if there be any such thing in me, (for I see it not) I pray Thee discover it to me and through Thy grace it shall lodge no longer. My heart is Thine alone, it is consecrated to Thee, and if any thing would profane Thy temple if it will not go forth by fair warning, let it be scourged out by Thy rod, yea by any rod whatsoever it pleaseth Thee to choose.

My hope is in Thee.] This holy man, seeing the vanity of all other expectations and pursuits of men, at length runs to this: And now, Lord, what wait I for My hope is in Thee. He finds nothing but moving sand every where else; but he finds this Eternal Rock to be a strong foundation, as the Hebrew word, by which He is styled doth signify. It is true, the union of the heart with God is made up by faith and love; but yet both these in this our present condition of absence and distance from God, do act themselves much by, the third grace which is joined with them, and that is hope. For faith is conversant about things that are not seen; and, in a great part that are not as yet, but are to come; and the spirit of faith, choosing things that are to come, is called hope. It is true they are not so wholly deferred, as that they possess nothing; but yet the utmost they possess is but a pledge and earnest-penny, a small thing in respect of that eternal inheritance they look for. What they have here is of the same kind with what they expect, but it is but a little portion of it; the smiles and glances of their Father's face, foretastes of heaven, which their souls are refreshed with. But these are but rare, and for a short time.

Hope is the great stock of believers: it is that which upholds them under all the faintings and sorrows of their mind in this life, and in their going *through the valley and shadow of death*. It is the *helmet of their salvation*, which, while they are looking over to eternity, beyond this present time, covers and keeps their head safe amidst all the darts that fly round about them. In the present discomfort and darkness of mind, and the saddest hours they meet with in this life, Hope is that which keeps up the soul; and it is that which David cheered up his soul with, Psa. xlii. 5. *Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.* And even in this point the *children of the world* have no great advantage of the *children of God*, as to the things of this life; for much of their satisfaction, such as it is, doth bang, for the most part, on their hope; the happiest and richest of them do still piece it out with some further expectation, something they look for beyond what they have, and the expectation of that pleases them more than all their present possessions. But this great disadvantage they have, that all their hopes are but heaps of delusions and lies, and either they die and obtain them not, or if they do obtain them, 'yet they obtain them not; they are so far short of what they fancied and imagined of them beforehand. But the hope of the children of God, as it is without fail sure, so it is inconceivably full and satisfying, far beyond what the largest apprehension of any man is able to reach. *Hope in God!* What is wanting there?

This hope lodges only in the pure heart: it is a precious liquor that can be kept only in a clean vessel, and that which is not so cannot receive it, but what it seems to receive it corrupts and destroys. It is a confidence arising from peace, agreement, and friendship, which cannot subsist betwixt the God of purity and those who allow unholiness in themselves. It is a strange impudence for men to talk of their trust and hope in God, who are in perfect hostility against Him. Bold fellows go through dangers here, but it will not be so hereafter. Jer. ii. 27. *They turn to Me the back, and not the face; yet, in their trouble, they say, Arise and save us:* they do it as confidently as if they never had despised God, but they mistake the matter; it is not so. *Go and cry,* says He, *to the gods whom ye have chosen.* Judg. x.

14. When men come to die, then they catch hold of the mercy of God; but from that their filthy hands are beat off, there is no help for them there, and so they fall down to the pit. A holy fear of God, and a happy hope in Him, are commonly linked together. *Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy.* Psa. xxxiii. 19.

And even in those who are more purified from sin, yet too large draughts of lawful pleasures do clog the spirits, and make this hope grow exceedingly weak. Surely the more we fill ourselves with these things, we leave the less appetite for the consolations of this blessed hope. They cannot know the excellency of this hope, who labour not to keep it unmixed: it is best alone, as the richest wines and oils, which are the worst of mixtures. Be sober and hope, says the Apostle Peter, 1 Pet. i. 13: keep your mind sober, and your hope shall be pure.' If any thing or person leans on two supporters, whereof the one is whole and sound, and the other broken or crooked, that which is unsound will break, though the other remain whole, and that which was propped up by it will fall; whereas the one that was whole had been sufficient: thus it is when we divide our hopes betwixt God and this present world, or any other good. Those who place their whole hopes on God, they gather in all their desires to Him; the streams of their affections are not scattered and left in the muddy ditches of the world, they do not fall into stinking pools, but being gathered into one main torrent, they run on in that; channel to the sea of His eternal goodness.

My hope is in Thee.] We cannot choose but all of us think that God is immensely good in Himself; but that which is nearer, whereon our hearts most rise, is a relative goodness, that He is good to us, and that He is so perfectly and completely good that having made choice of Him, and obtained union with Him, we need no more. Were once the hearts of the children of men persuaded of this, all their deliberations were at an end: they would not only choose no other, but defer no longer to fix on Him. And what can trouble the soul that is thus established? No change or overturning of outward things. Though the frame of the world itself were shaken to pieces, yet still the bottom of this hope is upon Him who changeth not. And whatever the pressures be, whether poverty, sickness, or disquiet of mind, thou mayest draw abundant consolation from Him in whom thou hast placed thy hope. There is only one thing that cruelly assaults it by the way, and that is the guilt of sin. All afflictions and troubles we meet with are not able to mar this hope or quench it, for where it is strong, it either breaks through them or flies above them: they cannot overcome it, for there is no affliction inconsistent with the love of God; yea, the sharpest affliction may sometimes have the clearest characters of His love upon it. But it is sin that presents Him as angry to the view of the soul. When He looks through that cloud, He seems to be an enemy; and when we apprehend Him in that aspect we are affrighted, and presently apprehend a storm. But even in this case, this hope apprehends His mercy. And thus David here.

LECTURE V.

Ver. 8. Deliver me from all any transgressions make me not the reproach of the foolish.

THIS is indeed the basis and foundation of all our other hopes, the free pardon of our sins. But none must entertain those sins, if they desire to be pardoned. *Repentance* and *remission of sins* are still linked together in the Scriptures; and he that would have sin pardoned, and yet live in it, or retain the love of it, would have God and sin reconciled together, and that can never be. David finds his sins pressing him down; he sees them as an army of men set in battle array about him ; and whither flies he for deliverance? Even to Him whom he had offended.

Ver. 9, 10. *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it. Remove Thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of Thine hand.*] We are naturally very partial judges of ourselves; and, as if we were not sufficiently able by nature, we study and devise by art to deceive ourselves. We are ready to reckon any good that is in us to the full, nay, to multiply it beyond what it is; and further to help this, we use commonly to look on those who have less goodness in them, who are weaker, more foolish and worse than ourselves; and so we magnify the sense of our own worth and goodness by that comparison. And as in the goodness we have, or imagine we have, so likewise in the evils we suffer, we use to extol them very much in conceit. We account our lightest afflictions very great; and to heighten our thoughts of them, we do readily take a view of those who are more at ease and less afflicted than ourselves; and by these devices we nourish in ourselves pride, by the overweening conceit of our goodness, and impatience, by the overfeeling sense of our evils. But if we would help ourselves by comparison, we should do well to view those persons who are, or have been, eminent for holiness, recorded in holy writ, or whom we know in our own times, or have heard of in former times; and by this means, we should lessen the great opinion we have of our own worth. And so likewise should we consider the many instances of great calamities and sorrows, which would tend to quiet our minds, and enable us to possess our souls in patience, under the little burden of trials that lies upon us. And, especially, we shall find those instances to fall in together, that as persons have been very eminent in holiness, they have also been eminent in suffering very sore strokes and sharp scourges from the hand of God. If we would think on their consuming blows and broken bones, their *bones burnt as a hearth*, and their *flesh withered as grass*, certainly, we should entertain our thoughts sometimes with wonder at God's indulgence to us, that we are so little afflicted, when so many of the children of men, and so many of the children of God, suffer so many arid so hard things; and this would very much add to the stock of our praises. We should not think that we are more innocent in not deserving those things that are inflicted on others, but rather, that He, who then measures out to them and to us, knows our size, and sees how weak we are in comparison of them; and that therefore He is indulgent to us, not because we are better, but because we are weaker, and are not able to bear so much as he lays on the stronger shoulders. Even in the sharpest of these rods, there is mercy. It is a privilege to the sheep that is ready to wander to be beaten into the right way. When thou art corrected, think that thereby thy sins are to be purged out, thy passions and lusts to be crucified by these pains; and certainly, he that finds any cure of the evils of his spirit by the hardest sufferings of his flesh, gets a very gainful bargain. If thou account sin thy greatest unhappiness

and mischief, thou wilt be glad to have it removed on any terms. There is at least in the time of affliction, a cessation from some sins; the raging lust of ambition and pride doth cease, when a man is laid upon his back; and these very cessations are some advantages. But there is one great benefit of affliction, which follows in the text, that it gives him the true measure of himself.

Ver. 11. *When with rebukes Thou dost correct man for iniquity, Thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely, every man is vanity, Selah.*] Man, at his best estate, is altogether vanity: but at his lowest estate, it appears best unto him, how much vanity he is, and how much vanity he was at his best estate, seeing he was then capable of such a change to fall so low from such a height. As that great man who was seeking new conquests, when he fell upon the sand, and saw the print of his own body, “Why,” says he, “so small a parcel of earth will serve me, who am seeking after new kingdoms!”—thus it is, when a man is brought down, then he hath the right measure of himself, when he sees how vain a thing he is.

Thus the Psalmist represents it here both as an argument to move God to compassion, and to instruct himself and other men. So Job xiii. 25: *Wilt thou break a leaf driven to and fro with the wind? and wilt thou pursue dry stubble?* And Psa. ciii. 14: *For He knoweth our frame: He remembereth that we are dust.* And his beauty, which seemed to be his perfection, yet, when the hand of God is on him, it is blasted as a moth-eaten garment. This should teach us humility, and to beware of sin, which provokes God to pour out His heavy judgments upon us. If any be proud of honour, let him remember Nebuchadnezzar and Herod; or if proud of riches, or of wit and endowments of mind, let him think how soon God can make all these to wither and melt away. *Surely, every man is vanity.*

Ver. 12. *Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; hold not Thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.*] What is this life we cleave so fast to, and are so uneasy to hear at parting with, what is it but a trance, and a succession of sorrows, a weary tossing and tottering upon the waves of vanity and misery? No estate or course of life is exempted from the causes of this complaint: the poorer and meaner sort are troubled with wants, and the richer with the care of what they have, and sometimes with the loss of it; and the middle sort betwixt the two, they partake in common of the vexations of both, for their life is spent in care for keeping what they have, and in turmoil for purchasing more; besides a world of miseries and evils that are incident equally to all sorts of men, such as sickness and pain of body, which is both a sharp affliction, and sits close to a man, and which he is least able, either by strength of mind, or by any art or rule, to bear; and this guest does as oft haunt palaces as poor cottages: there are as many groans of sick and diseased bodies within silken curtains, as in the meanest lodging. Neither does godliness exempt the best of men from the sufferings of this life. David who was both a great man and a good man, did share deeply in these, so that his conclusion still holds truth; no instance can be found to infringe it: *Surely every man is altogether vanity.*

It remains only to inquire, what manner of men they are who are furnished with the best helps, and with the most comfortable mitigations of their trouble, and with the strongest additions of support and strength to bear them up under it. And

it will certainly be found that godliness alone bath this advantage. And among the many consolations godly men have under their troubles, this is one, and the chief one, their recourse unto prayer. So here, and Psa. cxlii. 4, 5. So Isa. xxxviii. 2; *Hezekiah turned his face towards the wall*: he turns his back on all worldly counsils and vain helps, and betakes himself to prayer; and prayer brings ease, and support, and seasonable deliverance to the godly man. But *their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after other gods*; Psa. xvi. 4; and this all ungodly men do when they are afflicted: they run to other imaginary helps of their own, and those prove but the multipliers of sorrows, and add to their torment; they are *miserable* or troublesome *comforters*, like unskilful physicians, who add to the patient's pain, by nauseous, ill-chosen, and, it may be, pernicious drugs.

Now, in this prayer of David, we find three things, 'which are the chief qualifications of all acceptable prayers. The first is *humility*. He humbly confesses his sins, and his own weakness and worthlessness. We are not to put on a stoical, flinty kind of spirit under our afflictions, that so we may seem to shun womanish repinings and complaints, lest we run into the other evil, of *despising the hand of God*, but we are to humble our proud hearts, and break our unruly passions. There is something of this in the nature of affliction itself: as if the daytime men are abroad, but the night draws them home, so in the day of prosperity, men run out after vanities and pleasures, and when the dark night of affliction comes, then men should come home, and wisely lay the matter to heart. It is meet we *humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God*. It is meet to say unto Him, as Job xxxiv. 31, *I have been chastised, or, have borne chastisement, and I will not offend any more*. That is a kind of language that makes the rod fall out of His hand. That prayer ascends highest, which comes from the lowest depth of an humbled heart. But *God resists the proud*; He proclaims himself an enemy to pride and stiffness of spirit; but His grace seeks the bumble heart, as water does the low ground.

If a holy heart be the *temple of God*, and therefore a *house of prayer*, certainly, when it is framed and builded for such, the foundation of that temple is laid in deep humility, otherwise, no prayers that are offered up in it, have the smell of pleasing incense to Him.

The second qualification of this prayer is, *fervency* and *importunity*, which appears in the elegant gradation of the words: *Hear my prayer*, my words; if not that, yet *Give ear to my cry*, which is louder; and if that prevail not, yet *Hold not Thy peace at my tears*, which is the loudest of all; so David, elsewhere, calls it *the voice of his weeping*. Though this gift of tears doth often flow from the natural temper, yet where that temper becomes spiritual and religious, it proves a singular instrument of repentance and prayer. But yet there may be a very great height of piety and godly affections where tears are wanting; yea, this defect may proceed from a singular sublimity of religion in their souls, being acted more in the upper region of the intellectual mind, and so not communicating much with the lower affections, or these expressions of them. We are not to judge of our spiritual proficiency by the *gift of prayer*, for the heart may be very spiritually affected, where there is no readiness or volubility of words. The sure measure of our growth is to be had from our holiness, which stands in this, to see how our hearts are crucified to the world, and how we are possessed with the love of God, and with ardent

longings after union with Him, and dwelling in His presence hereafter, and in being conformed to His will here.

It is the greatest folly imaginable in some, to shed tears for their sins, and within a little while to return to them again: they think there is some kind of absolution in this way of easy venting themselves by tears in prayer, and when a new temptation returns, they easily yield to it. This is lightness and foolishness, like the inconstancy of a woman who entertains new hovers in her mourning apparel, having expressed much sorrow and grief for her former husband.

Now, fervency in prayer hath in it, 1st, Attentiveness of mind. If the mind be not present, it is impossible that much of the heart and affections can be there. How shall we think that God will hear those prayers which we do not hear ourselves? And shall we think them worthy of His acceptance, that are not worthy of our thoughts? Yet we should not leave off prayer because of the wanderings of our hearts in it, for that is the very design of the Devil, but still we must continue in it, and amend this fault as much as we can; by remembering, in the entry, with whom we have to do, by freeing our minds as much as may be from the entanglements and multiplicity of business, and by labouring to have our thoughts often in Heaven. For where the heart is much, it will be ever and anon turning thitherward, without any difficulty.

2^{dly}, Fervency of prayer hath in it an intense bent of the affections: to have our desires as ardent as can be for the pardon of sin, for the mortifying of our lusts and passions, for the delivering us from the love of ourselves and this present world; and for such spiritual things to pray often, and to follow it with importunity. That is to pray fervently, never to rest till an answer come.

The third qualification is *faith*. *He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of all that diligently seek Him*. Heb. xi. 6. And certainly, as he that comes to God must believe this, so he that believes this, cannot but come to God; and if he be not presently answered, *he that believes makes no haste*,—he resolves patiently to wait for the Lord, and to go to no other.

Surely, there is much to be had in prayer. All good may be obtained, and all evil averted by it; yea, it is a reward to itself. It is the greatest dignity of the creature to be admitted to converse with God. And certainly, the soul that is much in prayer, grows in purity, and is raised by prayer to the despising of all those things that the world admires and is in love with, and by a wonderful way is conformed to the likeness of God.

For I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.] In the Law, God recommends strangers to the care and compassion of His people; now David returns the argument to Him, to persuade Him to deal kindly with him.; *“For I am a stranger with Thee, that is, before Thee,—in this world wherein Thou hast appointed me to sojourn a few days. And I betake myself to Thy protection in this strange country; I seek shelter under the shadow of Thy wings; therefore, have compassion upon me.”* He that looks on himself as a stranger, and is sensible of the darkness both round about him in this wilderness, and also within Him, will often put up that request with David, Psa. cxix. 19, *I am a stranger on this earth; hide not Thy commandments from me*,—do not let me lose my way. And as we should use this argument to persuade God to look down upon us, so likewise, to

persuade ourselves to send up our hearts and desires to Him. What is the joy of our life, but the thoughts of that other life, our home, before us? And, certainly, he that lives much in these thoughts, set him where you will here, be is not much pleased or displeased; but if his Father call him home, that word gives him his heart's desire.

LECTURE VI.

Ver. 13. O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.

Why is it that we do not extremely hate that which we so desperately love, sin? For the deformity of itself is unspeakable: and, besides, it is the cause of all our woes. Sin hath opened the sluices, and lets in all the deluge of sorrows which makes the life of poor man nothing else than vanity and misery, so that the meanest orator in the world may be eloquent enough on that subject. What is our life, but a continual succession of many deaths? Though we should say nothing of all the bitterness and vexations that are hatched under the sweetest pleasures in the world, this one thing is enough, the multitude of diseases and pains, the variety of distempers, that those houses we are lodged in are exposed to. Poor creatures are oft-times tossed betwixt two, the fear of death, and the tediousness of life; and under these tears, they cannot tell which to choose. Holy men are not exempted from some apprehensions of God's displeasure. because of their sins; and that may make them cry put with David, O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and .be no more. Or, perhaps, this may be a desire, pot so much simply for the prolonging of life, as for the intermitting of his pain,, to have ease from the present smart. The extreme torment of some sickness, may draw the most fixed and confident spirits to cry out very earnestly for a little breathing. Or rather, if the words imply the desire of a recovery, and the spinning out of the thread of his life a little longer, surely he intended to employ it for God and His service. But long life was suitable to the promises of that time: so Hezekiah, Isa. xxxviii. 5. There is no doubt those holy men under the Law knew somewhat of the state of immortality; their calling themselves strangers on earth (Heb. xi. 13,) argued that they were no strangers to these thoughts. But it cannot be denied that that doctrine was but darkly laid out in those times. It is Christ Jesus who hath brought life and immortality to light, who did illuminate life and immortality, which before stood in the dark.

Surely, the desire of life is, for the most part, sensual and base, when men desire that they may still enjoy their animal pleasures, and are loth to be parted from them. They are pleased to term it, a desire to live and repent; and yet few do it when they are spared: like evil debtors, who desire forbearance from one term to another; but with no design at all to pay. But there is a 'natural desire of life, something of abhorrence in nature against the dissolution of these tabernacles. We are loth to go forth, like children who are afraid to walk in the dark, not knowing what may be there. In some, such a desire of life may be very reasonable; being surprised by sickness, and apprehensions of death, and sin unpardoned, they may desire a little time before they eater into eternity. For that change is not a thing to

be hazarded upon a few days or hours' preparation. I will not say that death-bed repentance is altogether desperate, but certainly, it is very dangerous and to be suspected; and, therefore, the desire of a little time longer, in such a case, may be very allowable.

I will not deny but it is possible, even for a believer, to be taken in such a posture, that it may be very uncomfortable to him to be carried off so, through the affrightments of death, and his darkness as to his after-state. On the other hand, it is an argument of a good measure of spirituality and height of the love of God, to *desire to depart, and be dissolved*, in the midst of health, and the affluence of worldly comforts. But for men to desire and wish to be dead, when they are troubled and vexed with anything, is but a childish folly, flowing from a discontented mind, which being over, they desire nothing less than to die. It is true there may be a natural desire of death, which at some times hath shined in the spirits of some natural men: and there is much reason for it, not only to be freed from the evils and troubles of this life, but even from those things which many of this foolish world account their happiness,—sensual pleasures, to eat and drink, and to be hungry again, and still to round that same course which, to souls that are raised above sensual things, is burdensome and grievous.

But there is a spiritual desire of death, which is very becoming a Christian. For Jesus Christ hath not only opened very clearly the doctrine of eternal life, but He Himself hath passed through death, and lain down in the grave; He hath perfumed that passage, and warmed that bed for us; so that it is sweet and amiable for a Christian to pass through and follow Him, and to be where He is. It is a strange thing, that the souls of Christians have not a continual desire to go to that company which is above; (finding so much discord and disagreement among the best of men that are here;) to go to *the spirits of just men made perfect*, where there is light, and love, and nothing else; to go to *the company of angels*, a higher rank of blessed spirits; but, most of all, to go to *God, and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Testament*. And, to say nothing positively of that glory, (for the truth is, we can say nothing of it,) the very evils that death delivers the true Christian from, may make him long for it; for such an one may say—I shall die, and go to a more excellent country, where I shall be happy for ever: that is, I shall die no more, I shall sorrow no more, I shall be sick no more, and, which is yet more considerable, I shall doubt no more, and shall be tempted no more; and, which is the chiefest of all, I shall sin no more.