

Five Sacramental Sermons

Sermon 5

A Sermon after The Communion. — The Fainting Believer Strengthened for His Work.

John Willison

John Willison was born in the year 1680, in the neighborhood of Stirling, Scotland. Not much is know about his personal and private life, but soon after he completed his academic career, he received a unanimous call to serve as pastor from a parish in Brechin in 1703. About the year 1718 he was transferred to Dundee where he remained for the remainder of his life, serving a large congregation. He served as a faithful minister of the gospel for 47 years until his death on the 3rd of May, 1756. John Willison was a man of great piety and a staunch defender of the faith. We are indeed fortunate to have extant copies of his sermons and his polemical works, from which the above sermon is derived.

He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength — Isa. xl. 29.

THE prophet having concluded the preceding chapter with a prophecy of the captivity of the Jews into Babylon, though it was many years before it came; he in this and the succeeding chapter, furnishes the church and people of God with a great many precious promises for their support and comfort, during that long captivity; which surely would be of great use to them in that cloudy and dark day.

In the latter end of this chapter, the prophet is reprovng the people of God, who are now supposed to be captives at Babylon, for their unbelief and despondency under their affliction, in saying or thinking God had either cast them off; or could not help them, verse 27. For remedying whereof, he puts them in mind of God's power and all-sufficiency to help in the greatest straits, verse 28. And in the text and following verses, he assures them of God's compassion, and readiness to help them under all their sinking discouragements, "He giveth power to the faint," &c.

More particularly in the text, we may notice these things: 1. The sad case of many of God's people in captivity, "They were faint and without might," i.e. They were under pressures and burdens both outward and inward, that were ready to crush them, and make them faint away; they were called to several pieces both of service arid suffering; for which they had no strength nor might of themselves. 2. We have their mercy and

privilege under this sad case ; power and strength; i.e. spiritual strength mainly, which is graciously promised them for their encouragement, under all their faintings and trials. 3. The author of this privilege, “The everlasting God, the Lord Jehovah, with whom is everlasting strength, who fainteth not, neither is weary. 4. The way how this mercy is conveyed; it is in a way of free gift, without any worth or merit on our part; he giveth it, and he increaseth it; he giveth strength where it is not, and he increaseth it where it is already given in any measure.

Doctrine, “That as the Lord's people while here are liable to many fainting discouragements, under which they cannot support themselves, so the Lord is pleased to give them suitable strength for all their exigencies.” This is also confirmed from that gracious promise, recorded in the following chapter, Isa. xli. 10, “Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” And the psalmist confirms this truth by his own comfortable experience, Psal. cxxxviii. 3, “In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength to my soul.”

The method I choose for prosecuting this doctrine, shall be,

- I. To inquire into those fainting discouragements, which believers labour under while here.
- II. Why 'the Lord doth let them meet with such trials.
- III. How it is that the Lord doth strengthen his weak and fainting people.
- IV. What are the great ends and uses for which the Lord gives such strength to his people.
- V. Give some reasons to prove, that the Lord will certainly give them this strength.
- VI. Make improvement.

I. As to the first, viz. To instance some of those fainting discouragements that believers labour under while here, and which in a special manner, call for divine support. And these are of two sorts; viz. either of a temporal or a spiritual nature.

1. Sometimes they meet with external afflicting providences, which are very discouraging:

As when they are troubled with poverty and want, so that they know not how to subsist themselves and their families; this is a great trial, and requires spiritual strength from God to help them to carry right under it. — When they are destitute of earthly friends, and have none to comfort or sympathise with them in trouble; this is also a heavy trial that needs strength from God — When they are loaded with reproaches and misrepresentations, and that not only from enemies, but even from friends; this hath been very sinking to the best of God's people. — When they are vexed with the death and loss of near and dear relations, pleasant children, and helpful friends; this case has been afflicting to many. — When they are under bodily sickness or racking pains, so that they “have no rest in their bones, wearisome nights are appointed for them, and

they are full of tossings till the dawning of the day.” — When they have a near view of meeting with death, that king of terrors, and terror of kings. — When they are under the oppressions and persecution of cruel enemies. These are trials that the dearest of God's children are exposed to, and under which they would be ready to faint, if they were not strengthened from above. And especially those outward pressures are very sinking and discouraging to them; especially when they think it is their sin that has brought them into these sad circumstances, or when their trials are of a long continuance, and it may be something in them appears to be singular, as it was in the case of the Jews in Babylon. Then it is that God's people are ready to faint and succumb, and should look to God to step in with suitable supplies of strength.

2. Sometimes God's people are troubled with fainting discouragements of a spiritual nature:

As when they find indwelling corruption, and heart-plagues strong and prevailing: this case was very affecting and afflicting to David, Psal. lxxv. 3, and to Paul, Rom. vii. 24, and to the church, when they cried out, Isa. lxxiv. 6, “Our iniquities like the wind have taken us away:” *q. d.* The tide is so strong, we have no might to stem it. — When the “enemy is exalted over them,” and Satan doth harrass them with blasphemous injections, horrid atheistical thoughts, and violent temptations; he sometimes tempts God's children to the greatest of sins, as he tempted Job to curse God: how is the soul ready to faint at such a time, if it get not strength from God and crieth out, “How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? It is like a sword in my bones, when the enemy reproacheth me, and saith daily to me, Where is thy God? O my Rock, why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?”

3. When God hides his face, and they cannot get access to him in duty; so as they think, they are given up and left to struggle with Satan and corruption in their own strength. That is a melancholy case to the soul, under which it would faint, without secret support from God.

4. When they find their hearts wholly out of frame for any spiritual duty; by reason of much backwardness to it, wearying of it, and corruption working in them, which carries them away from God in time of duty: such as atheism, unbelief; worldly-mindedness, heart-hardness, &c. Now the soul would faint, and wholly backslide from God, if he did not secretly uphold it.

5. When the soul is brought back again, as it were, to the foot of mount Sinai, and made to hear the thunderings thereof; and the curses of a broken law renewed: the law gets a new commission to take the man into custody, and put his feet into the stocks: so that the old wounds are opened, and former guilt is revived, and God seems to behave to him like a stranger or an enemy. Thus he did to Heman, Psal. lxxxviii. Now, at such a time the soul is ready to faint, and say, “Is his mercy clean gone for ever! Will he be favourable no more? Hath he forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in his anger shut up his tender mercies? But especially if sickness, or the messenger of death, come and knock at the man's door, while in such a case, O, how is he distressed with the melancholy

apprehensions of death and judgment! "Death," thinks he, "is near, and I am most unready for it; judgment is approaching, my accounts are unclear, and the Judge's face all covered with frowns." Now the soul indeed would faint if God in Christ did not support it.

6. As believers have many fainting discouragements, upon the account of their own case, so also upon a public account, in respect of the church, and land wherein they live: As when they see a spirit of slumber and deep sleep fallen upon professors, so that they are not moved with the judgments of God, when denounced both by his word and providence; yea, though "the fire be kindled, and burning round about them, yet they lay it not to heart." — When they see religion under a great and visible decay among all ranks, many turning daily more careless and indifferent about duty, more slack about family-worship and secret prayer, and daily more carnal and worldly in their conversation. When they see Christian love decay, divisions and animosities increase, malice, envy, and hatred of one another prevail, and people growing more selfish, minding their own things, and careless about the things of Jesus Christ. — When they see God's Spirit in a sad measure withdrawn from the assemblies of his people; ordinances become as a sealed book, dry breasts, and a miscarrying womb, so that Ichabod may be written on them, or "God is departed;" when they see communions lifeless, and not what they want to be. Christ is absent and yet few sensible of the judgment, or laying it to heart, so as to lament after the Lord. They see many busy to sin him away, but few endeavouring to pray him back again. The sincere seekers of God are often like to faint under this discouragement.—When they see many professors making soul-slips, yea, falling into scandalous sins, to the reproach of religion, and hardening of the wicked; and but few like to be found sincere in their profession. — When they see those that are truly godly, tender and conscientious in their walk, public-spirited and concerned for the interest of Christ, removing and going off the stage: this is a very melancholy and sinking discouragement to the few that are left behind, under which they need support from God: hence it was that the psalmist cries so earnestly, Psal. xii. 1, "Help, Lord, for the godly man that ceaseth: for the faithful fall from among the children of men"

II. The second thing proposed was, to inquire why the Lord lets his people be troubled with such fainting discouragements.

1. To correct them for their former faults and miscarriages; hence we read, Jer. iv. 18, when the Lord had threatened several sad things against his people, he saith, "thy ways and thy doings have procured these things to thee." God will have his people to smart for sin; not to make any satisfaction for sin, but to render sin bitter unto them.

2. To humble and make them low, in the midst of their great attainments and signal enjoyments: believers are still apt to be puffed up with these, if they were not kept under by humbling dispensations. Hence, even Paul himself had a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him, "lest he should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of revelations," 2 Cor. xii. 8.

3. To let them know the difference betwixt earth and heaven, a militant and triumphant state. When things go well with us in, the world, we are apt to say, with Peter on the mount, "It is good for us to be here." But when these go ill, God's people turn their tongue, and say with the psalmist, Psal. lxxiii. 27, "It is good for me to draw nigh to God." When we live at ease, we are ready to think ourselves at home: but when trouble comes, we begin to say, "Arise, let us depart, this is not our rest." It is not easy to wean us from the comforts of this life: and therefore God many times doth rub gall and wormwood on the breasts of this present world, to imbitter its comforts, and take our hearts off it.

4. To awaken the spirit of prayer, and make them more importunate in their addresses to the throne of grace, Psal. cxxx. 1. Christ suffered the storm to continue, till the ship was almost overwhelmed, that the disciples might come and awaken him with their cries to help them, Matt. viii. 25.

5. That his people may get new proofs of his love and tender care in strengthening such weak reeds as they are, to endure such storms; and in his: stepping in so seasonably for their relief and support, ready to faint and succumb. God's people have much to speak on this account, to the praise of his free grace, Psal. xciv. 18, "When I said, My foot slippeth, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up."

6. To cause his people long for heaven, and mend their peace in the way to it, Phil. i. 23. There is a great difference betwixt our prayers in health and in sickness; our repentings in prosperity and adversity, Isa xxvi. 16; Hos. v. 15. He that in prosperity prayed with a cold heart and dry eyes, can in affliction cry aloud and mingle his prayers with tears. Though heaven was much out of sight and out of mind before, and he had scarce a thought of flitting; yet now when distress comes, he begins to sigh with David, Psal. lv. 6, "O that I had wings like a dove; for then would I flee away, and be at rest I would hasten my escape from the windy tempest."

III. The next thing is to inquire how it is that the Lord doth strengthen his weak and fainting people. And here I shall do two things First, Inquire into the nature of the spiritual strength the Lord gives his people. Second, Into the way and manner how he conveys it to them.

As to the first, This spiritual strength supposeth that the soul is made alive and raised out of the grave of sin and a natural state, by the quickening Spirit of God. And that the soul is united to Christ by faith, who is the fountain and channel of all grace and spiritual strength.

But more directly, God's strengthening his people imports these things:

1. The Lord's creating and implanting the habits of grace in the soul, which are the strength of the soul: and therefore called the armour of God, and our shield and helmet, Eph. vi.

2. His increasing of grace in the soul; for he not only plants these habits, but strengthens them, and gradually perfects what he has begun, Psal. xcii. 12, 13.

3. His breathing on his work of grace in the soul, and thereby actuating his people's graces, and drawing them forth into a lively exercise: for God must not only plant grace and increase it but also set it at work and bring it into action," Phil. ii. 13, "It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do."

4. The Lord's strengthening of his fainting people imports his letting out and conveying of fresh supplies of grace to his people, in the time of their need. Not only doth he plant, increase, and actuate grace, but likewise he doth come in with seasonable supplies and reinforcements to the weak and decayed graces of his people, answerable to their pressures and exigencies. Grace of itself is but a creature, and subject to perish, and would soon be destroyed by the frequent attacks made upon it, if it were not seasonably reinforced with new supplies from its author. And thus the Lord, from time to time, feeds the believer's lamp with fresh oil; gives it more faith, more love, more hope, and more desires; and thus he gives power to the faint, and strengthens these things which remain when ready to die.

5. It imports the supplying the soul with experiences of the power, mercy, and faithfulness of God, for the nourishing and strengthening of faith in the time of trial; and therefore we find the Lord, when he is strengthening his fainting people, in the text and context, he refers them to their former experience, ver. 27, 28, "Hast thou not heard? Hast thou not known?" How then sayest thou, that God hath forsaken thee! Often do we find David strengthening his faith this way, Psal. xlii.; cxvi.

6. It lies in the Lord's applying to the soul his gracious and comfortable promises, and thereby animating his people with spiritual courage and resolution to grapple with all their enemies and difficulties. He shows that God is on their side, that his "grace is sufficient for them, and that he will never leave them, nor forsake them," Isa. xli. 10; Psal. cxviii. 6; Heb. xiii. 5,6; 2 Cor. xii. 9.

7. The Lord strengthens his people, by giving them an encouraging view and prospect of a happy outgate from all their trials and discouragements, and of a glorious victory over all their enemies, Job xix. 25; Rom. xvi. 20; 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

I come to the second thing; viz. To show the way and manner how this spiritual strength is conveyed to believers. And this you may take up in these following propositions:

1. God has treasured up in Jesus Christ his Son, a fulness of grace and spiritual strength for his people. As our Mediator is the purchaser of his strength, so he is the trustee to whom it is given in order to be bestowed upon believers. This is clear from the promises of God for giving strength, they run in this channel, Zech. x. 12, "I will strengthen them in the Lord;" i.e. in Christ, "and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the Lord. — "From the precepts of God which are in the same strain, Eph. vi. 10, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," 2 Tim. ii. 1, "My son, be

strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ.” — From the practice of the saints, they all look for their strength this way, Isa. xlv. 24, “Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.” And Paul saith, Phil. iv. 18, “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.” So that Christ is our head of influence and store-keeper. The stock of our grace and strength, since Adam's fall and mismanagement, is all put in Christ's hand; he is the great steward of heaven, the key of the store-house is in his custody, and on him we must daily depend for necessary supplies.

2. The way that Christ our head and treasurer communicates his strength, and gives out the necessary supplies thereof to his people, is by the ministration of the Holy Spirit, and his gracious operations and influences on their souls, John xv. 29; xvi. 14, 15, And for this effect, the Spirit of God dwells in believers, to excite and draw forth their graces to frequent acts and a lively exercise; and to give them, those gracious aids and assistances their exigencies call for.

3. The way that the, Holy Spirit gives this strength to believers is, in the use of appointed means, both public and private, Psal, lxxxiv. 4-7. Where we see that those who would go from strength to strength, must dwell in God's house, and attend his ordinances. We expect not our daily food without labouring, tilling, sowing, and reaping; so neither can we look for spiritual strength but in the use of the word, sacraments, and prayer.

IV. The fourth thing in the general method is, To show what are the great ends and uses for which the Lord gives this spiritual strength to his people.

1. He gives it to them for doing or performing of duty; for without new supplies of strength we cannot act spiritually, nor persevere in duty: hence the spouse cries out, Cant. i. 4, “Draw me, and we will run after thee.” And the psalmist saith, Psal. cxix. 32, “I will run the ways of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.” God's work must ever be done in God's strength.

2. He gives it for suffering, and bearing of crosses and afflictions, and we need God's strength that we may do it without murmuring or fainting, Col. i. 11.

V. The next thing was to give reasons, why the Lord will certainly give suitable strength to his people under all their exigencies.

1. Because it was purchased for them by their Surety, Christ, and promised to them, in him, Zech. x. 12.

2. Because they were, in the most solemn and serious manner, recommended to the care of God by his beloved Son Jesus Christ, when he was leaving the world, John xvii. 11.

3. Because of their near relation to him, and his great love to them; they are the subjects of his kingdom, the children of his family; yes, they are, as it were, the wife of

his bosom; and will he not then take special care of them?

4. Because they rely and depend wholly upon the Lord himself for this strength and support. Isa. xxvi. 3; Psal. Lvii. 2.

5. Because the Lord knows that his people have many strong and dangerous enemies; and that they have no inherent strength to hold out against them, having lost all that by the fall. Yea, he knows that they have a natural inclination to backsliding, that the seed of the worst sin is in them, and of themselves they cannot stand before the least spark of temptation; and so would be infallibly undone, if he did not strengthen them, Hos. ii. 7; Psal. xix. 13.

APPLICATION.

Use I. Of *Information*. We may hence see,

1. That worldly prosperity and carnal joy are no sign of God's favour: for God's people are subject to many fainting discouragements here. Wicked men receive their good things in this life, but believers' good things are to come.

2. We may hence be informed of the difference between the two covenants of works and grace. Adam, by the first was to do all by his own inherent strength; but believers, under the second, do all by borrowed strength, and must he constantly beholden to God for new supplies. And it is well for us that it is so, for our stock is far surer in God's hand, than in our own. When the prodigal got his stock in his own hand, he presently left his father's house, "went into a far country," and squandered all away, and so would we, if God should trust us with it. Besides, by this gracious method, believers are kept humble all their days, and put to keep up a constant correspondence with a throne of grace, and give all the glory of their through-bearing to God's free grace. Blessed be God for the well ordered covenant.

3. We may hence see, how great security believers have for their through-bearing: almighty power is engaged for them; they are strengthened and "kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation." So that everlasting strength must fail before a believer can finally miscarry.

Use II. Of *Reproof*.

1. To those who are too secure and confident when they attain to any spiritual comfort or joy, and do not remember the fainting discouragements God's people are subject to while in this world. O communicants, have you been kindly entertained at this feast! Be not vain or secure, all things here are changeable. How suddenly was David's case altered! Psal. xxx. One time he is mounted up in prosperity; but being too confident, he is presently cast down and troubled. And in Psal. cxix. we find him at one time "rejoicing

in God's testimonies, as much as in all riches;" and very soon after, his "soul is cleaving to the dust, and melting for heaviness." Go not then to build too much on sensible consolations, for these come and go at God's pleasure; it is in heaven only you can have continual day without night or cloudings; but here you are to look for changes, yea, for fainting discouragements, therefore prepare for them by securing a title to divine strength.

2. To these believers who give too much way to fainting discouragements, and do not encourage themselves in their covenanted God and his strength. I do not marvel, O communicants, though you are cast down, who are sensible of the hidings of God's face, the prevailing of heart-plagues, the buffetings of Satan, &c. but only give not way to excessive discouragement: I call it excessive when it is ready to make you give over hopes, lay aside endeavours, indispose you for holy duties, refuse to apply to Christ your all-sufficient help, or refuse comfort from God's promises of strength and support. Some indeed think religion lies in desperate unbelieving thoughts, and in making of complaints: but surely there is no religion there, otherwise we must conclude Cain, Judas, and the damned, to be godly. Religion rather lies in the actings of faith, and improving God's promises for strengthening us in doing his will.

3. To Arminians, who maintain the doctrine of free-will; viz. That it is in the power of a man's free-will to do that which is spiritually and savingly good, if he pleases to use his natural abilities. O, how little do these men know themselves that talk so! for if it be not in the power of a man's will, when graciously changed and, renewed to do good, without superadded supplies of grace and strength from God from time to time, as certainly it is not; far less can a natural and unregenerate person do it, that is dead in trespasses and sins.

4. To those communicants who look not entirely to God in Christ for strength for the work and warfare, duties and difficulties before them; but lean too much to something in themselves, or something they have got at this occasion.

(1.) Some trust too much to the stability of their own resolution and engagements. They have vowed and sworn, and they hope likewise to perform accordingly. But do not depend upon these, otherwise they will soon fail you; as they did Peter after the first communion. The psalmist was under many resolutions to keep close to the way of duty, yet he says, Psal. lxxiii. 2, "My feet were almost gone, and my steps had well nigh slipt." And he acknowledges it was nothing but God's mercy that held him up, Psal. xciv. 18.

(2.) Others trust too much to the stability of their gracious habits, without looking to God for daily renewed influences of strength, for actuating and recruiting their weak graces. But what is grace, faith, love, fear of God, repentance, hope? Of themselves they are but vanishing things, and if they were not seasonably strengthened and supplied from heaven, they would soon die, Rev. iii. 2.

5. We may here reprove those who make it an excuse for the neglect of duty, they want strength. O! it is because they want will. For can you say, that though you have no

strength of yourselves; yet you desire to cast your impotent souls in God's way, and aim at duty as ye can, looking to God for strength, and pleading his promise? Could you say this, it were something. Were you like a man rowing up the water, and still beat back by the impetuous stream, you might have some shadow of excuse; but when you do not make sincere attempts, you can have none.

QUEST. *How shall we undertake to perform duty, when we are dead, and find influences and strength withdrawn?*

ANS. Whatever be our case or frame, yet still God's command is of binding force on us, and obliges us to do it.

2. No pretence of indisposition, can warrant our not obeying a divine command: for our deadness and indisposition is our sin, and one sin can never excuse another. *Two blacks cannot make one white*. So that in a dead hour, you must essay to do your duty, though you can do nothing but the very outward form.

3. You must aim at your duty to prevent greater evils, for if you neglect it wholly, your case grows still worse: your deadness increases, your hardness, impenitency, darkness, weakness, and indisposition, will still grow greater.

4. By aiming at duty, you put yourselves in God's road; and when, like the blind man, you lie in Christ's way, you are more likely to get a visit or an alms from him than those who stay at a distance.

5. Duties performed, when we are indisposed, may be very pleasing to God. It must surely be acceptable to our gracious Lord and Master, to see one of his weak or lamed servants attempt to go his errands, though he halt and make but slow progress in his way: nay, this will move his tender heart to pity him, and give him strength. And many a time have his servants got supplies of strength on a sudden, when they have been essaying duty. Their souls, "ere they were aware, have made them like the chariots of Aminadab," Cant. vi. 12. Therefore, O discouraged communicant, persist in aiming at thy duty, whatever be thy present frame. Who knows, when thou art lifting at thy heavy burden, but God will graciously lend thee aid and lift it for thee.

Use III. Of Trial. O communicants, examine if you have got any spiritual strength at this solemn feast. Many a weak believer has found it a strengthening meal to their fainting souls. Mark, if it be so with you. 1. Do ye find your graces more quick and vigorous than formerly. As, for instance, 1. Is faith more lively? Are you better pleased with the contrivance of grace, and method of salvation, than before? And are you now enabled to abandon your own righteousness, and go to your Surety, Christ; laying the burden of your sins upon him, and leaning wholly to him for pardon and acceptance with God: and also looking to him as your head of influences for heart-purity and sanctifying grace, and strength to perform duty? 2. Is your repentance and grief for sin increased? Do you see more of sin's deformity, and abhor it as the enemy of Christ? And are you more afraid of piercing your Redeemer by it, and more resolved against wicked company and

temptations to sin, than before? 3. Is your love and desire toward Christ more quickened? Are you more restless without his presence? Would you part with your best enjoyments in the world, for a sight of his face? Are you more desirous of heart-holiness, that you may be capable to serve Christ, and advance the interest of his kingdom?

2. If this ordinance hath been a strengthening meal to you, then you will find more delight in duty than before, you will be inclined and enabled to pray more fervently, to hear more attentively, to praise more affectionately, to receive more believingly, keep the Sabbath more exactly, watch over your heart and ways more diligently: and, in a word, to be more humble and pious towards God, more just and righteous towards man, and more sober and temperate towards yourselves; yea, you will be more afraid to shift or neglect any known duty, than you were before.

3. You will be more animated and encouraged to “fight the good fight of faith,” to resist the devil's temptations, and the world's allurements, to struggle against your lusts, and mortify indwelling sin. And you will be setting conscience on the watch-tower, to give warning of the enemy's approach; and you will not be slow to take the alarm.

4. If you have got more strength, you will be better reconciled to the cross than formerly; and content with patience and submission to underly what troubles and afflictions the Lord thinks fit to try you with for your soul's good; yea, and kiss the rod when it comes, saying “Good is the will of the Lord concerning me.”

Use IV. Of Exhortation. Let me hence exhort you to several duties.

1. Let those believers, who are not tried with such fainting discouragements as others, bless God for his tenderness towards them, and bear their smaller trials the more patiently. How gentle is your exercise and soul trouble, in respect of Job's, David's, Heman's, and many others, dear and near to God, who have been ready to faint under their burdens, and pressed above measure; God is gracious to you, he sees you are weak, and will not overburden you.

2. Let none misconstrue believers' exercises of spirit, nor despise them, because they are frequently faint and discouraged: for the greatest spirits in the world have been thus exercised. David was a man of singular valor, that had a heart as “the heart of a lion,” 2 Sam. xvii. 10. A man of eminent wisdom, and therefore said to be “wise as an angel of God,” 2 Sam. xiv. 20. A man of a cheerful temper, and a great master of music, and therefore called the “sweet singer of Israel,” 2 Sam. xxiii. 1. And yet we frequently find him sore troubled, bowed down, cleaving to the dust, and sharply exercised under the hidings of God's face, and other soul-distresses.

3. Doth God give suitable strength to his people in all exigencies? Let none abuse this doctrine, by giving up with the use of the means that God has appointed; and neglecting to use their own endeavours. For though believers have Christ to lean to all their way in their journey to heaven; yet none must expect to be carried thither upon his shoulders,

without setting down a foot. We may warrantably look to him for strength for every duty; yet it is in our using the means that this strength is conveyed.

4. Beware of leaning to yourselves, and neglecting to look for this promised strength. (1.) Lean not to your own purposes; for your "goodness is like the morning dew." (2.) Lean not to your gracious habits; for these are but creatures, and ready to die. (3.) Lean not to your duties and performances; for they are defiled and unclean. (4.) Lean not to your frames; for they are fleeting and inconstant. And besides, it is highly dangerous and provoking to God, for to trust in any of these; remember the fearful curse that is pronounced against him "that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord," Jer. xxvii. 5, 6. Whom then shall we trust? Read Isa. xxvi. 4, "Trust ye in the Lord fore ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

5. Let all believing communicants bless God for this new and excellent method of salvation through Jesus Christ. The new covenant is far better than the old. Now, our stock is not in our hand, but in Christ's, and he manages it for us; which is our great happiness. As when God brought Israel out of Egypt with a high hand, he did not set them down on the other side of the Red sea, and then bid them shift their way to Canaan: no, he led them on their way; yea, "As a man carries his children, so he bare them all the way they went. So when God, in a day of his power, brings an elect soul out of spiritual Egypt; he doth not set him in the way with a stock of strength in his hand, and then leave him to march through the wilderness alone: no, he leads and supports him all the way; for he knows that the whole country rises on him in his march, and if left to go alone, without special and renewed aid, he would never get to Canaan.

QUEST. But what course shall I take to get these seasonable supplies of strength from God, that I may be helped safe through the wilderness, without fainting and failing?

ANS. Take these directions:

1. Labour to be thoroughly convinced of your impotence and insufficiency; that you may be weak in your own sense and feeling; for the way to be strong, is to be weak, according to the apostles experience, 2 Cor. xii. 10. 'When I am weak, then am I strong.' Hence also it is said of these worthies, Heb. xi. 34, "Out of weakness they were made strong," i.e., out of weakness felt and apprehended.

2. Humbly represent and bemoan your impotence before God, like Ephraim, Jer. xxxi. 18, "I heard Ephraim bemoaning himself, I was a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." He felt his own impotence and aversion to what was good; and then he groans and looks up to God for power: "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God." And, in the next verse, we see how readily the Lord stepped in with pity and help to him. Thus also did Jehoshaphat, and found help, 2 Chron. xx. 12, "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon thee; *q. d.* Though we be weak, yet we know thou art infinitely powerful, and full of compassion.

3. Use well any small power you have, and it will increase. The right arm is more strong and vigorous than the left, because it is more exercised. So grace, the more it is exercised, the more it grows, Mat. xiii. 12; Prov. x. 29.

4. Wait on the Lord in the diligent use of the means; for it is promised, Isa. xl. 31, "They that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength." And in Psal. xxvii. 14, "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." We must use, but not trust to the means, but to God in the due use of them.

5. Walk tenderly, and guard against every known sin; for sin lets out the soul's strength, as bleeding lets the spirit out of the body.

6. Be often looking, in a believing way, to the Mediator, Christ, your Treasurer and Head of influences; and derive all your supplies of strength from, and through him alone.

7. Carefully entertain the Spirit's motions, and fall in with them. "Grieve not the Spirit of Christ, which is sent to strengthen you; otherwise you will, in so doing, cast away your strength from you.

Lastly, Acquaint yourselves, O communicants, with the word of God, and its gracious promises of strength; lay them up in store against the time of need, and plead them humbly with God: for prayer, grounded on a promise is likely to prevail. This was David's argument under his faintings, Psal. cxix. 28, "Strengthen thou me according to thy word." And he had the experience of its prevailing with God Psal. cxxxviii. 3, "In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." I shall add no more, but conclude with the apostle's words, 1 Pet. v.10, 11, "The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." Amen.

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