

A TREATISE OF THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD

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

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

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

— Ephesians 6:10-20.

THE INTRODUCTION

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

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

The devil had as good have let Paul alone, for he no sooner comes into prison but he falls a preaching, at which the gates of Satan's prison fly open, and poor sinners come forth.

Happy for Onesimus that Paul was sent to jail; God had an errand for Paul to do to him and others, which the devil never dreamed of. Nay he doth not only preach in prison, but that he may do the devil all the mischief he can, he sends his epistles to the churches, that tasting his spirit in his afflictions, and reading his faith, now ready to be offered up, they might much more be confirmed; amongst which Ephesus was not least in his thoughts, as you may perceive by his abode with them two years together, Acts 19:10; as also by his sending for the elders of this church as far as Miletus, in his last journey to Jerusalem, Acts 20:17, to take his farewell of them as never to see their faces in this world more. And surely the sad impression which that heart-breaking departure left on the spirits of these elders, yea, the whole church, by them acquainted with this mournful news, might stir up Paul, now in prison, to write unto this church, that having so much of his spirit, yea, of the spirit of the gospel, left in their hands to converse with, they might more patiently take the news of his death.

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

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

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

PART FIRST

A Sweet and Powerful Encouragement to the War

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

The apostle begins his speech with THE WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO BATTLE: '*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord;*' the best way indeed to prepare them for the following directions. A soul deeply possessed with fear, and dispirited with strong apprehensions of danger, is in no posture for counsel. As we see in any army when put to flight by some sudden alarm, or apprehension of danger, it is hard rallying them into order until the fright occasioned thereby is over; therefore the apostle first raiseth up their spirits, '*be strong in the Lord.*' As if he should say, Perhaps some drooping souls find their hearts fail them, while they see their enemies so strong, and they so weak; so numerous, and they so few; so well appointed, and they so naked and unarmed; so skilful

and expert at arms, but they green and raw soldiers. Let not these or any other thoughts dismay you; but with undaunted courage march on, *and be strong in the Lord*, on whose performance lies the stress of battle, and not on your skill or strength. It is not the least of a minister's care and skill in dividing the word, so to press the Christian's duty, as not to oppress his spirit with the weight of it, by laying it on the creature's own shoulders, and not on the Lord's strength, as here our apostle teacheth us. In this verse (under four heads or branches), We have **FIRST**, A familiar appellation, '*my brethren.*' **SECOND**, An exhortation, '*be strong.*' **THIRD**, A cautionary direction annexed to the exhortation, '*in the Lord.*' **FOURTH**, An encouraging amplification of the direction, '*and in the power of his might,*' or in his mighty power.

BRANCHES FIRST AND SECOND.

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

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

*[Christian courage and resolution
—wherefore necessary.]*

DOCTRINE, *The Christian of all men needs courage and resolution.* Indeed there is nothing that he does as a Christian, or can do, but is an act of valour. A cowardly spirit is beneath the lowest duty of a Christian, 'be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest'—What? stand in battle against those warlike nations? No, but that thou mayest 'observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee,' Joshua 1:7. It requires more prowess and greatness of spirit to obey God faithfully, than to command an army of men; to be a Christian than a captain. What seems less, than for a Christian to pray? yet this cannot be performed aright without a princely spirit: as Jacob is said to behave himself like a prince, when he did but pray; for which he came out of the field God's banneret. Indeed if you call that prayer, which a carnal person performs, nothing is more poor and dastard-like. Such an one is as great a stranger to this enterprise, as

the craven soldier to the exploits of a valiant chieftain. The Christian in prayer comes up close to God, with a humble boldness of faith, and takes hold of him, wrestles with him; yea, will not let him go without a blessing, and all this in the face of his own sins, and divine justice, which let fly upon him from the fiery mouth of the law; while the other's boldness in prayer is but the child, either of ignorance in his mind, or hardness in his heart; whereby not feeling his sins, and not knowing his danger, he rushes upon duty with a blind confidence, which soon quails when conscience awakes, and gives him the alarm, that his sins are upon him, as the Philistines on Samson: alas, then in a fright the poor-spirited wretch throws down his weapon, flies the presence of God with guilty Adam, and dares not look him in the face. Indeed there is no duty in the Christian's whole course of walking with God, or acting for God but is lined with many difficulties, which shoot like enemies through the hedges at him, while he is marching towards heaven: so that he is put to dispute every inch of ground as he goes. They are only a few noble-spirited souls, who dare take heaven by force, that are fit for this calling. For the further proof of this point, see some few pieces of service that every Christian engageth in.

First.—The Christian is to *proclaim and prosecute an irreconcilable war against his bosom sins*; those sins which have lain nearest his heart, must now be trampled under his feet. So David, 'I have kept myself from my iniquity.' Now what courage and resolution does this require? You think Abraham was tried to purpose, when called to take his 'son, his son Isaac, his only son whom he loved,' Gen. 22:2, and offer him up with his own hands, and no other; yet what was that to this? Soul, take thy

lust, thy only lust, which is the child of thy dearest love, thy Isaac, the sin which has caused the most joy and laughter, from which thou hast promised thyself the greatest return of pleasure or profit; as ever thou lookest to see my face with comfort, lay hands on it and offer it up: pour out the blood of it before me; run the sacrificing knife of mortification into the very heart of it; and this freely, joyfully, for it is no pleasing sacrifice that is offered with a countenance cast down—and all this now, before thou hast one embrace more from it. Truly this is a hard chapter, flesh and blood cannot bear this saying; our lust will not lie so patiently on the altar, as Isaac, or as a 'Lamb that is brought to the slaughter which was dumb,' but will roar and shriek; yea, even shake and rend the heart with its hideous outcries.

Who is able to express the conflicts, the wrestlings, the convulsions of spirit the Christian feels, before he can bring his heart to this work? Or who can fully set forth the art, the rhetorical insinuations, with which such a lust will plead for itself? One while Satan will extenuate and mince the matter: It is but a little one, O spare it, and thy soul shall live for all that. Another while he flatters the soul with the secrecy of it: Thou mayest keep me and thy credit also; I will not be seen abroad in thy company to shame thee among thy neighbours; shut me up in the most retired room thou hast in thy heart, from the hearing of others, if thou wilt only let me now and then have the wanton embraces of thy thoughts and affections in secret. If that cannot be granted, then Satan will seem only to desire execution may be stayed awhile, as Jephthah's daughter of her father: 'let me alone a month or two, and then do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth,' Judges 11:36, 37, well knowing few such reprieved lusts but at last obtain their full pardon; yea, recover their favour with the soul. Now what resolution doth it require to break through such violence and importunity, and notwithstanding all this to do present execution? Here the valiant swordsmen of the world have showed themselves mere cowards, who have come out of the field with victorious banners, and then lived, yea, died slaves to a base lust at home. As one could say of a great Roman captain who, as he rode in his triumphant chariot through Rome, had his eye never off a courtesan that walked along the

street: Behold, how this goodly captain, that had conquered such potent armies, is himself conquered by one silly woman.

Second.—The Christian is to *walk singularly, not after the world's guise*, Rom. 12:2. We are commanded not to be conformed to this world, that is, not to accommodate ourselves to the corrupt customs of the world. The Christian must not be of such a complying nature as to cut the coat of his profession according to the fashion of the times, or the humor of the company he falls into; like that courtier, who being asked how he could keep his preferment in such changing times, which one while had a prince for Popery, another while against Popery, answered, he was *e salice, non ex quercu ortus*—he was not a stubborn oak, but bending osier, that could yield to the wind. No, the Christian must stand fixed to his principles, and not change his habit; but freely show what countryman he is by his holy constancy in the truth. Now what an odium, what snares, what dangers doth this singularity expose the Christian to? Some will hoot and mock him, as one in a Spanish fashion would be laughed at in your streets. Thus Michal fouted David. Indeed, the world counts the Christian for his singularity of life the only fool; which I have thought gave the first occasion to that nickname, whereby men commonly express a silly man or a fool. Such a one, say they, is a mere Abraham; that is, in the world's account, a fool. But why an Abraham? Because Abraham did that which carnal reason, the world's idol, laugh's at as mere folly; he left a present estate in his father's house to go he knew not whither, to receive an inheritance he knew not when. And truly such fools all the saints are branded for by the wise world. 'You know the man and his communication,' said Jehu to his companions, asking what that mad fellow came for, who was no other than a prophet, II Kings 9:11. Now it requires courage to despise the shame which the Christian must expect to meet withal for his singularity. Shame is that which proud nature most disdains, to avoid which many durst not 'confess Christ openly,' John 7:13. Many lose heaven because they are ashamed to go in a fool's coat thither. Again, as some will mock, so others will persecute to death, merely for this nonconformity in the Christian's principles and practices to them. This was the trap laid for the three children; they must dance before

Nebuchadnezzar's pipe, or burn. This was the plot laid to ensnare Daniel, who walked so unblameably, that his very enemies gave him this testimony, that he had no fault but his singularity in his religion, Dan. 6:5. It is a great honour to a Christian, yea, to religion itself, when all their enemies can say is, They are precise, and will not do as we do. Now in such a case as this, when the Christian must turn or burn, leave praying, or become a prey to the cruel teeth of bloody men; how many politic retreats and self-preserving distinctions would a cowardly unresolved heart invent? The Christian that hath so great opposition had need be well locked into the saddle of his profession, or else he will soon be dismounted.

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

Fourth.—The Christian must *trust in a withdrawing God*, Isa. 50:10. Let him that walks in darkness, and sees no light, trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. This requires a holy boldness of faith indeed, to venture into God's presence, as Esther into Ahasuerus', when no smile is to be seen on his face, no golden sceptre of the promise perceived by the

soul, as held forth to embolden it to come near, then to press in with this noble resolution, 'If I perish, I perish,' Est. 4:16. Nay, more, to trust not only in a withdrawing but a 'killing God,' Job 13:15; not when his love is hid, but when his wrath breaks forth. Now for a soul to make its approaches to God by a recumbency of faith, while God seems to fire upon it, and shoot his frowns like envenomed arrows into it, is hard work, and will try the Christian's mettle to purpose. Yet such a masculine spirit we find in the poor woman of Canaan, who takes up the bullets of Christ shot at her, and with a humble boldness of faith sends them back again in her prayer.

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

[*Use or Application*]

Use First.—This gives us reason why there are so many professors and so few Christians indeed; so many that run and so few obtain; so many go into the field against Satan, and so few come out conquerors; because all have a desire to be happy, but few have courage and resolution to grapple with the difficulties that

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

Use Second.—Let this then exhort you, Christians, to labour for this holy resolution and prowess, which is so needful for your Christian profession, that without it you cannot be what you profess. *The fearful* are in the forlorn of those that march for hell, Rev. 21; the violent and valiant are they which take heaven by force: cowards never won heaven. Say not that thou hast royal blood running in thy veins, and art begotten of God, except thou canst prove thy pedigree by this heroic spirit, to dare to be holy despite men and devils. The eagle tries her

young ones by the sun; Christ tries his children by their courage, that dare to look on the face of death and danger for his sake, Mark 8:34, 35. O how uncomely a sight is it to see, a bold sinner and a fearful saint, one resolved to be wicked, and a Christian wavering in his holy course; to see guilt put innocence to flight, and hell keep the field, impudently braving it with displayed banners of open profaneness; [to see] saints hide their colours for shame, or run from them for fear, who should rather wrap themselves in them, and die upon the place, than thus betray the glorious name of God, which is called upon by them to the scorn of the uncircumcised. Take heart therefore, O ye saints, and be strong; your cause is good, God himself espouseth your quarrel, who hath appointed you his own Son, General of the field, called 'the Captain of our salvation,' Heb. 2:10. He shall lead you on with courage, and bring you off with honour. He lived and died for you; he will live and die with you; for mercy and tenderness to his soldiers, none like him. Trajan, it is said, rent his clothes to bind up his soldiers' wounds: Christ poured out his blood as balm to heal his saints' wounds; tears off his flesh to bind them up. For prowess, none to compare with him: he never turned his head from danger: no, not when hell's malice and heaven's justice appeared in field against him; knowing all that should come upon him, [he] went forth and said, 'Whom seek ye?' John 18:4. For success insuperable: he never lost battle even when he lost his life: he won the field, carrying the spoils thereof in the triumphant chariot of his ascension, to heaven with him: where he makes an open show of them to the unspeakable joy of saints and angels. You march in the midst of gallant spirits, your fellow-soldiers every one the son of a Prince. Behold, some, enduring with you here below a great flight of afflictions and temptation, take heaven by storm and force. Others you may see after many assaults, repulses, and rallyings of their faith and patience, got upon the walls of heaven, conquerors, from whence they do, as it were, look down, and call you, their fellow-brethren on earth, to march up the hill after them, crying aloud: 'Fall on, and the city is your own, as now it is ours, who for a few days' conflict are now crowned with heaven's glory, one moment's enjoyment of which hath dried up all our tears, healed all our wounds, and made us forget the

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

sharpness of the fight, with the joy of our present victory.' In a word, Christians, God and angels are spectators, observing how you quit yourselves like children of the Most High; every exploit your faith doth against sin and Satan causeth a shout in heaven; while you valiantly prostrate this temptation, scale that difficulty, regain the other ground, you even now lost out of your enemies' hands. Your dear Saviour, who stands by with a reserve for your relief at a pinch, his very heart leaps within him for joy to see the proof of your love to him and zeal for him in all your combats; and will not forget all the faithful service you have done in his wars on earth; but when thou comest out of the field, will receive thee with the like joy as he was entertained himself at his return to heaven of his Father.

*[Christian courage and resolution
—how obtained.]*

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

First. An established judgement in this truth of God. He that knows not well what or whom he fights for [may] soon be persuaded to change his side, or at least stand neuter. Such may be found that go for professors, that can hardly give an account what they hope for, or whom they hope in; yet Christians they must be thought, though they run before they know their errand; or if or if they have some principles they go upon, they are so unsettled that every wind blows them down, like loose tiles from the house top. Blind zeal is soon put to a shameful retreat, while holy resolution, built on fast principles, lifts up its head like a rock in the midst of waves. 'The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits,' Dan. 11:32. The angel told Daniel who were the men that would stand to their tackling, and bear up for God in that hour, both of temptation and persecution, which should be brought upon them by Antiochus; [that] not all the Jews, but some of them, should

be corrupted basely by flatteries, others scared by threats out of their profession; only a few of fixed principles, who knew their God whom they served, and were grounded in their religion, these should be strong, and do exploits: that is, to flatteries they should be incorruptible, and to power and force unconquerable.

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

BRANCH THIRD

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

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

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

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

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

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

[1. Prayer.] Would he pray? Where will he find materials for his prayer? Alas, he 'knows

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

[2. *Hearing the Word.*] Well, cast your eyes once more upon the Christian, as engaging in another ordinance of *hearing the word preached*. The soul's strength to hear the Word is from God. He opens the heart to attend, Acts 16:14, yea, he opens the understanding of the saint to receive the Word, so as to conceive what it means. It is like Samson's riddle, which we cannot unfold without his heifer. He opens the womb of the soul to conceive by it, as the understanding to conceive of it, that the barren soul becomes a 'joyful mother of children.' David sat for half a year under the public lectures of the law, and the womb of his heart shut up, till Nathan comes, and God with him, and *now* is the time of life. He conceives presently, yea, and brings forth the same day,

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

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

Reason First. The first reason may be taken from *the nature of the saints and their grace*. Both are creatures, they and their grace also. Now², 'it is in the very nature of the creature to depend on God its Maker,' both for being and operation. Can you conceive and accident to be out of its subject, whiteness out of the wall, or some other subject? It is impossible that the creature should be, or act without strength from God. This to be, act in and of himself, is so incommunicable a property of the Deity, that he cannot impart it to his creature. God is, and there is none besides him. When God made the world, it is said indeed he ended his work, that is, of creation: he made no new species and kinds of creatures more; but to this day he hath not ended his work of providence: 'My Father worketh hitherto,' saith Christ, John 5:17, that is, in preserving and empowering what he hath made with strength to be and act, that therefore he is said to hold our souls in life. Works of art, which man makes, when finished, may stand some time without the workman's help, as the house, when the carpenter that made it is dead; but God's works, both of nature and grace, are never off his hand, and therefore as the Father is said to work hitherto for the preservation of the works of nature, so the Son, to whom is

². *Inesse est de esse creaturæ.*

committed the work of redemption, he tells us, worketh also. Neither ended he his work when he rose again, any otherwise than his Father did in the work of creation. God made an end of making, so Christ made an end of purchasing mercy, grace, and glory for believers, by once dying; and as God rested at the end of creation, so he, when he had wrought eternal redemption, and 'by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high,' Heb. 1:3. But he ceaseth not to work by his intercession with God for us, and by his Spirit in us for God, whereby he upholds his saints, their graces, and comforts his life, without which they would run to ruin. Thus we see as grace is a creature, the Christian depends on God for his strength. But further,

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

left, would come out of their dens and holes where they lie lurking, and eat up the little grace the holiest on earth hath; it would be as bread to these devourers.

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

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

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