

# SERMON XXXIII

## GOD'S COVENANT WITH HIS PEOPLE, THE GROUND OF THEIR SECURITY

Tobias Crisp

*"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." {Is.41:10}*

Upon a like occasion, now offered, I have, {peradventure, in the hearing of some present,} made entrance into these words that I have read unto you; I shall give you but a taste of what I have formerly spoken; so much as may serve, by way of introduction to that, in which I mean to spend the remainder of this time.

The occasion of the words, you may see in the former part of this chapter. At this instant, was a great tumult, upon raising of the righteous man from the east, that is, the setting up of Christ; such a noise, that God was fain to call for silence, and then for their plea, verse 1, if they had anything to say against this, to bring their strongest reasons. Having obtained silence, the Lord makes his plea against their tumultuous opposition, verse 2, who is he that raised Christ up, and hath given nations to him, and "made him to rule over kings?" I, "the Lord did it," verse 4, what have you to say to me? He shall prosper with ease, he shall go softly, he shall never run for fear of being circumvented; he shall go in a way that his foot hath not trod before; he shall go further than he hath gone. And what say they to this, when God speaks? Yet, the tumultuous men will not be quiet, they consult to find out help; nay, they conspire, the carpenter and the smith. {vs.7}

Now, because there is such a combustion when Christ is set up, lest the people of the Lord should be possessed with fear of miscarriage, he turns his speech to them; "fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God." Christ, whenever he is exalted, did, doth, and will, find great opposition; but, in spite of all, he shall prosper, all opposition shall not hinder; nay, he will go softly, that the world may see that he is not afraid of any whatsoever. In this text, the Lord is pleased to provide a pillow {as for a king} for the heads of his people, or a staff for their trembling hands, to support their sinking spirits; they are apt, to be discouraged; it seems the Lord is pleased to take their condition into his hand, to speak to the occasion of their trembling; and to give out such words that may be a stay, that they may stand fast, though blusterings grow greater than they are.

The text is nothing but gracious encouragement, or a comfortable support of a sinking spirit; the encouragement is, "fear not, be not dismayed;" the arguments by which he would prevail with them not to fear, nor be dismayed, are, "I am with thee; I am thy God; I will help thee; I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." The point is, they that have God, for their God, need never fear, nor be dismayed; seeing he is with them, will help them, strengthen them, and "uphold them with the right hand of his righteousness."

Concerning this fear and dismay, we spake largely the last time on this occasion. 1. What it is not to be afraid. 2. What we are not to be afraid of. 3. What the inconveniences of such fear are.

1. In brief, not to fear is no more but a composedness against any evil that cometh. Excellent is that expression, Psalm 112:7, they "shall not be afraid of evil tidings." Why? Because their "heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD." Established, they shall not be removed. Here is the expression of a fearless heart, a heart fixed, established, and not moved. You have it likewise excellently set out, Daniel 3:16, in the story of the three children, being sentenced to be cast into the fiery furnace; they came before the great king Nebuchadnezzar, and he spake big to them, and tells them what they must trust unto, if they will not fall down and worship his God. Mark now, their fearlessness is

expressed, as they "answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, &c." See what a disposition this is, and what the ground of it; here is a true fearlessness, if whenever evil comes, men can say, it matters not, we are ready for it. And look into the root of it, and you shall find it in their answer that "our God is able to deliver us;" that made them so careless in so weighty a thing.

2. What it is we should not fear. I answer, not God himself, as to do us any hurt; though fear him with awful reverence we must. A believer, that is the servant and chosen of God, need not fear that he will do him any hurt. "It is God that justifieth," therefore will not harm thee. The heart of God is to his people; "my bowels are troubled for thee;" saith he to Ephraim. Can he hurt them while he is troubled for them? They must not fear their own sins; I do not say, they ought not to fear to commit sin; but they ought not to fear what hurt their sins can do them, seeing they are blotted out. If a man have subscribed and sealed an hundred bonds, and all these are cancelled, he need fear no hurt they can do him. Paul in Romans 7, complains indeed of a body of death, and the power of sin; but in the close, he shows how little he fears anything that sin could do. "Thanks be unto God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." What doth he thank him for? That though his sins were so great, yet they could not do him any hurt, nor any of God's people. Look into chapter 8:1-3.

Now beloved, give me leave to tell you, if you be believers, and weak in faith, I dare be bold to say, nothing cuts the heart so much, in respect of fear of evil, as the sins you commit; these will be swords to your hearts; but if you be believers indeed, the sword is broken, the sting is gone. "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" over sin and death; so that we may boldly say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" {I Cor.15:55-57} If you be the Lord's, and he yours, if you be believers, you may triumph as the apostle doth; it is gone; nay, "O death; saith the Lord, {in the prophecy of Hosea} I will be thy destruction." I beseech you, give not ear, either to Satan, or to whatsoever instrument he hath, that would possess you, that though Christ died for you, and bore your sins himself upon the cross, or on the tree, {as the apostle Peter expresses} yet those same sins will do you hurt, and prove a mischief to you. I say, there cannot be greater affront offered unto Christ, than to make the believer conceive that he was not able to bear their sins, nor the wrath of God sufficiently for them, but that they must be wounded, notwithstanding all that he hath done. If Christ be hurt as much as sin can hurt him, how can any man be hurt by it, for whom he suffered? If he upon the cross took the sting out of it, and carried it to his own grave, how cometh it to have a new one? Or did he die in vain? If he took away the sting of one sin, and not another, there were need of another Christ, it seems, to take away that which is left behind, and so Christ hath not perfected forever them that are sanctified. {Heb.10:14} I desire you to hear with patience; this is the first ground of all your comfort in affliction, that sin is gone; for them all your afflictions cannot give discomfort, seeing all arise from sin, the sting of affliction. Hereupon the apostle triumphs, "who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth," who can condemn? Contrariwise, the soul is in the greatest bitterness, when sin remains, and the sting of it is not taken away, but when God is reconciled, as he is to the faithful, and not sin imputed, II Cor.5:19, how can sin do hurt, when it is not to be imputed? God uses to reckon when he takes payment; if he doth not reckon with men, he will never smite them with wrath; as is the wrath, so must be the hurt that person is to sustain, in respect of sins committed; chastise he doth indeed, for special ends, but the sin doth not at all hurt; and though the Lord afflicts, that will do you no hurt neither; for afflictions are his physic to purge the conversation. Will a man think that is ready to die of the stone, or wind-colic, or stoppage in the stomach, if a physician comes and gives him a bitter portion that he does him any hurt, when he knoweth it is to recover his life and save it? He knows he dies, if he heals not the infirmity; God useth no physic, no chastisement or affliction, but it shall work for good; as in Heb.12:11, "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." What hurt is there in all this?

But I must come to that which I have more particularly to deliver to you; and that is upon the consideration of God's motives, by which he attempts to prevail over the spirits of his people, not to

be afraid, or dismayed, come what can, or may, he is best able to persuade; he best knows what rhetoric will take with his own people. A man that hath had the breeding of a child, and observes the temper of it, can better tell, than any other, which way to win him. God hath the breeding of his own children; nay, he goeth further, he hath them at his own beck, and therefore, can best tell which way to work upon them, and beget that in them which he calls for of them. The Lord would have them not be afraid, nor dismayed; let him propose his way to bring them to this composedness of spirit; it is but presumption in any creature to conceive, there may be better ways to work upon the spirits of men, than that which God prescribes; and it is worth our observation to consider, that when the Lord puts his people upon such a spirit, he doth not say, you have fasted, prayed, forsaken your sins, denied yourselves, and walk holily with me, and therefore, fear you not; he hath higher propositions, that have more excellent virtue to move his people. He saith, "fear not, I am thy God; I will help thee, and uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." The prop for upholding of spirits against fear, when evil cometh, is without a man's self, in him that is a rock, and unchangeable; the Lord doth not say, you change not, you continually proceed in holiness, and waver not, therefore ye are not consumed, but, "I am God, and change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob, are not consumed."

Therefore, if you would have settledness of spirit, you must go out of yourselves, and fetch it out of God himself; and I dare be bold to say, take all the comfort of all the world, of all the creatures mixed together; extract the quintessence of their excellencies, all shall never settle a heart, nor make it secure and free from fear, but only this, that God is their God; and by the fruit of this principle, a poor tottering spirit is under-propped, with four pillars, at every corner one, as I may say; or rather, there is one main principle, and three subordinate supporters affixed unto the main principle, for sometimes you shall see great weights laid upon some great pillar, and for the better securing of that which is laid upon it, some short pillars branching out from the main, spread out wide, and so upholding.

This present discourse seems to be such a main principle, that is, God's being a God to such a people, "I am thy God;" this is the foundation, this is the great pillar, "I am with thee, I will help thee, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness;" they are the three supporters that issue out of this main principle; for they are all but branches flowing from this privilege of God's being your God; these, I say, are sufficient to keep the most tottering spirit immoveable, like mount Zion, never to be removed. I shall take the principle, the main support, into task, at this present, and therein consider what excellency there is in it: "Fear not I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God."

In handling of this, that you may the better see what stability there is for a tottering spirit in this support, let us consider: 1. What it is for God to be thy God. 2. What a person hath in this, who hath God for his God. 3. By way of answering objections, show how it is so well with those that are the Lord's, this being true, that God himself is their God. 4. How he becomes their God, and upon what terms. 5. How he will be found of them to be so. There are excellent usefulnesses, if the truth be well sifted, and dived into.

#### 1. What it is for God to be thy God.

There is much in it, nay, there is more in it than is any one thing delivered in scripture; there is all in it that concerns the present and future well-being and happiness of a believer; all is in this one thing, "I am thy God." While you have all things else but this, you have but the rays of the sun; while you have this, you have the sun itself in his brightness, glory, and lustre. But to clear this a little, what it is for God to be thy, or my God; you must not understand the Holy Ghost, speaking in the plural number, of the whole world; or, of all the members of Christ, as one body; the passage is to be understood distributively of every such particular person, and so he is thine, and mine, and theirs; I am their God, is all one with, "I am thy God." In the scriptures you find a vast difference between God, simply and abstractedly considered, and relatively considered; and that we must note beforehand, that you may know wherein the strength and comfort of this passage lies. For God to say, "fear not, I am thy God," is ten thousand times more comfortable, and hath more in it, than simply for him to have said, "fear not, I am God." I say, there is far more support in this expression of him, considered as our God; than as he is considered simply and abstractedly without relation to us; for so

it imports only to us, the incomprehensible, perfect, and complete being of God, as he is in himself; but, considered in relation, as he is thy God, imports to us, not only what he is, in respect of his absolute perfection, but, what he is to them, whose he is; so that the phrase imports, not only what God simply is, but also, that whatever he is, in and from himself, the same he is to those persons whose he is. It is worth the observation, that the scriptures plainly hold out, that whenever the Lord is spoken of, in reference to wicked men, he is never mentioned in way of relation unto them, but only to his own people; you will not find in all the scripture, God said to be the God of any person that is a wicked man; but, lest there be a mistake, you must know this relation of God to people, may be considered, either as common, or as special and peculiar. It is true, take a church, as it is mixed, so sometimes the Lord is spoken of in relation to them; as for example, Exod.20:2, "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Here is God spoken of in relation, "I am the Lord thy God;" and this seems to be spoken collectively to the whole body of the church, one with another; but always observe this rule, where the Lord is mentioned in relation to a mixed people, that is, a church, consisting of mixed persons, all the privileges from such a relation of God, in reference to such persons, are but common privileges; so in that text, "I am the Lord thy God," observe, he calls himself indeed, their God, takes them conjunctly, one with another; but wherein their greatest privilege was, which they had, in having him their God, he expresses thus; "that brought thee out of the land of Egypt;" which was but a common privilege; and therefore, though God be said to be the God of people, being mixed, yet he is not so theirs, as he is his own peoples, the living members of Christ. Those that are mixed, receive some common propriety, or common things in that propriety; but they partake not of the whole propriety. Usually in scripture, the phrase, "I am thy God," is spoken only to the Lord's servants, his chosen, that he will not cast off; and so it is to be understood in this text, as it is in the words immediately before it, for you will see that God speaks peculiarly of his own elect people, and saith of them, and to them, "fear not, be not dismayed, I am thy God, &c." The Lord frequently expresses himself in this relation, when he comforts and stays up his people, as the best motive to uphold their spirits. "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light; let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God." {Is.50:10} Here is the very basis, the great pillar to bear up, even in a state of darkness; God is his God, let him stay himself upon him, because of this relation. Beloved, a man that trusts to another man's estate, trusts to a broken staff, as we say, and may be deceived, except that be made his own; a child of light can never be able to walk in darkness, except he have assurance that God is his God, by whom he stands. "God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God;" saith the psalmist. {Ps.62:7} "Who is God save the LORD; or who is a rock save our God?" {Ps.18:31} So Thomas, not being present when Christ made it appear to the rest, that he it was that suffered, and rose again, because he would not believe Christ was risen, he received this check; "because thou hast seen thou believest; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Now Thomas, having such a check, what had he to rest upon but this, "my Lord, and my God." "Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God." {Jn.20:28} When Christ seemed to be angry, he closed with this, "O God, thou art my God;" thou canst not forsake me, thou canst not be wanting to me, thou art my own.

It will be worthwhile to consider, what the Lord's being a man's own God is, and the best way to set this out unto you, is to speak as plainly as may be, even in the most familiar way, by which you may reach some of the depth of this mystery. "I am thy God," is as much as to say, thou hast a propriety in me; or, I am as much thine own, as any goods, or anything is thine; look, therefore, what difference you may observe between these two things; much treasure, great revenues in general; and this much treasure, great revenue, and this my possession. I say, what difference you observe between these two particulars, things simply considered, and things particularly considered as yours; the same difference there is between God simply considered, and considered as thine. You know what difference there is in the spirits of men, looking upon things these two ways. There is difference in outward things, as a poor man looks upon the riches and honors of great men with an envious heart and uncomfortable spirit; now the ground of it is this, he looks upon them as none of his own. Two

malefactors are condemned to die, one hath a pardon sent him, the other none; now mark how these two persons differ, looking upon this one pardon; so are you to conceive of the difference between God simply being God, and being their God; for he whose pardon it is, can say it is my pardon. Oh; his heart leaps within him, having found a ransom; he hath received his life again; his heart is taken up infinitely in the consideration of his pardon; but look upon the other man, he seeth the same pardon, and looks upon it with a trembling heart and sad spirit. Now all the difference of the case of these two persons, depends upon the propriety in the one, and want of it in the other; a wicked man may think of God simply as God; but he can never say, {till he reveals it unto him, that he is an elect person,} that he is his God, and think upon him as his own; see then how much thy case is better for thee to consider God is thine, than to consider him in himself, and how great thy privilege is of having him to be thy God.

But what kind of propriety is it? I answer, it imports as much, as when thou sayest, that such money or land is thine. If you will have the nature of propriety, the apostle, in Acts 5:4, will tell you in general what it is; the land, {speaking of that which was sold by Ananias,} "was it not thine own?" When it was sold, was not the money "in thine own power?" So then, for a man to have a thing as his own is to have it in his own power, to do with it as is best, and most profitable for his own advantage, to the utmost extent of the worth of the thing. As for example, suppose a man hath money in his purse, he wants bread, his money is in his own power to dispose of for the supply of his want, and so, in general, he may make use of all for it. So, God's being a man's own, imports, that so far as God will go, as I may say, for a man's use, and for the supply of all his necessities, so far he hath power with him; God himself is engaged to give forth himself to the utmost for such a man's good.

Now, God's all-sufficiency reaches beyond all wants; so that he that hath God for his God, hath him for all the uses that can be for his good. If a man be many hundred pounds in debt, and hath land that is his own, he may make use of it for the best to make him a free man again; he may sell and dispose of it as far as it will reach, to pay his debts, and procure his discharge; but, if it be another man's land, then he cannot make use of it to pay his own debts, but must remain as he was before; so the Lord is able to make up everything that is defective, to all that have propriety in him; I do not say, that a man can sell him, but I say, so far as God can reach, with his all-sufficiency, so far may I draw up from him, as from a well of salvation, whatsoever I stand in need of; the believer hath as free and uncontrollable right, in God, being his own, as he hath in the money and land that is his own; the one is not more in his power, than the other. It is true, indeed, a man may abuse his land or money, and so he may abuse God too; but using things as men use things that are their own, that is, for their best advantage, they have as much interest in God for the uses they have occasion for, and as much power with him, as anything in their own power. When God gives gold and silver to men, he gives but some thick clay, but when he communicates himself, he gives all that he is; and he that hath God for his God, hath everything that he is or can do. God can do nothing by his omnipotent power, nor devise anything by his infinite wisdom, but all this is as much in propriety his, who hath God for his God, as it is God's own; his propriety in himself is but that he is his own; their propriety in him is that he is theirs. All the difference will be this; God, in respect of himself, hath the disposing of himself by himself, and no other disposes of him, but himself; as for the people of God, because they know not how to dispose of him, as I may say, to their best advantage; therefore, he is pleased to give out himself according to their several occasions, as he in his wisdom seeth most conducing to their good; for example, a father hath an inheritance for his own; his child hath land by inheritance too; now, during minority, the child is not capable to manage it; but the one hath as much propriety in his land as the other; all the difference is that the father disposes of his land for his own use himself, the child hath his land disposed of for his use by the father; but, I say, the propriety is the same. So far as God may be useful for a creature, he is the creature, to do good to it; I do not speak here, according to the foolish fancy of some, nor conceive as if there were a transmutation of the creature into God; but, I speak of him, in respect of usefulness for accommodation, so far as it is possible for a creature to have him; he hath made over himself in particular; for man may have a propriety in God, passed over unto him, as these good things of his that we enjoy, are not transmuted into man's

nature, nor is it changed into that good; but so far as they may be useful to him, or conduce to his welfare, so far he may make use of them; so, when God is thy God, so far as he may be useful to thy good, he is as much thine, as anything is thine. Be it far from thee, therefore, to think that God is able to do good in such and such a case, and yet I cannot, I shall not, have him for such good to myself; this man that so thinks, must needs conclude, God is not his God. Was it ever heard, that a man had money in his purse, and yet wanted bread, and perished for want, except there were no bread to be had for money? So, this is to deny the all-sufficiency of God, to think that he cannot, or will not, supply us with all needful blessings. Assure yourselves, as God is your own, so as far as may be, for your good, you have him as much as anything that is yours; only, you have not the disposing of him to yourselves, and for yourselves, that he hath in trust for you. And this will serve for a hint by way of answer, to some questions by-and-by. Thus, considering what men have, in having God; let us now consider what the treasure is, in having him to be ours.

It is true, there are some things in which creatures have propriety, and yet are little the better for them, the things being not of sufficiency; a woman may have propriety in a husband, and yet she may be a beggar, if he be one; she can have no more than he hath; therefore propriety simply, is no comfort, but the nature of the thing wherein there is. If God be an empty and scant propriety, then there were but little comfort in having him; but mark, he that makes himself over in covenant, the God of such a people, is the greatest, richest, most incomprehensible treasure that can be. You have heard of some that have been raised from beggars to mighty estates; they have been had in admiration that they should be made so rich. What should the sons of men do, if they were able to apprehend what infinite superlative treasure they have all at once, when God is theirs? Beloved, I conceive it a matchless mercy that he reveals but glimmeringly for the present, and some taste of the treasure that we have in him; for certainly, the over-excellency of that fulness, he gives unto us in him, would swallow us up; we should not be able to endure the glory of it, if he revealed all unto us; and that is the reason we know but in part now, because we should be confounded in the knowledge of all that is to be known, and all what God is to his own people. There are three particulars whereby especially you may observe, what great treasure people have, in having God to be their God.

1. In regard of the quality of the treasure. 2. In regard of the virtue of it. 3. In regard of the sovereignty, universality, and variety of help in it.

1. In regard of the quality of the treasure; men may have many things, which may be of little worth, for want of excellency of quality; there is a great deal of difference between a heap of dust, and of diamonds; he that hath one, may be a beggar, and the other having the same quantity, is the richest man in the world; so we having propriety in God, are the richest persons in heaven or earth, by reason of the excellencies that are in him; some men have not many acres of land, but the few they have, in regard of the riches of them, are more worth than many millions of others. One acre, as I may say, of propriety in the Lord, is worth a thousand of the richest properties in the world; so rich is God, and everything that is in him. All things that are given to enjoy are but beams of this Sun of Righteousness; and if there be so much glory in the beams, what is there in the body of the sun itself? David, when he considered the countenance of the Lord, and its superlative excellency, breaks out into admiration, "there be many that say, who will show us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." {Ps.4:6,7} Mark, while others look for goods, for corn, and wine; he looks for God's gracious countenance, and having that, lies down and sleeps, as one filled and satiated. There is abundance of treasure and superlative excellency in God; silver and gold are not to be compared unto him; nay, the apostle Peter, comparing silver and gold unto Christ, saith, they are but corruptible things, in respect of his blood; how much more is God himself, whereunto Christ's blood is but the means? Now the means is subordinate unto the end for which it is a means; if then, the blood of Christ be so precious, that silver and gold are but corruptible things in comparison of it, what is God, the blood of Christ brings us unto?

2. Consider the virtue of it; many things are of worth in the world, that are of little virtue in themselves; some are worth a thousand pounds, in respect of their value, but when they come to use,

and afford virtue, are but dry and unprofitable; they can never cure the sick, nor warm the cold, nor recover the weak. Such are gold and silver in themselves, they can afford the weak heart no nourishment, they have none in them; a little bread in the house, in a famine, is worth a house full of silver; so God, being your God, if there were no suitableness in him, or fulness to supply your wants, then your propriety in him were the less considerable; but you will find the Lord is not more rich than he is full of virtue unto all those to whom he is a God; the quintessence of all virtues is in him; all the virtues of the world are but beams that proceed from him; they are but fruit that drops from him; he is the root, from which all is derived. The virtue of physic is more eminent in God that gives power to it, therefore he must needs be instead of all these, and abundantly supply the want of all.

It was an excellent speech of a woman in Queen Mary's days, for whom, because of her courage for the truth, they would take away her bread, she answered, "that if they took away her bread, God would take away her stomach." There is such a usefulness in him, that he serves for all necessities; and observe the variety of uses that there are in him, to all that he is a God unto; all manner of plenty and variety are comprised in him; reckon up all the wants men are subject unto; many physicians and surgeons have dived into the various kinds of diseases incident unto the body of man; but suppose every creature should sit down, to cast up every particular disease or want it is subject to, it would make up more volumes than are yet in the world, by setting down particularly every defect, incident to the whole creation one time or other; yea, were the wants multiplied to infinite millions more than they are indeed, yet there is such a variety of help and supply in God, that there is no disease or lack, but there is a fulness of redress for it in him, especially to his people, for all this virtue he puts forth in their behalf, so far as it may be for their good. As for the quantity of goodness that is in God, the truth is, beloved, it is not to be expressed; the word quantity, is but a representative word, to set out how much usefulness and help there is in God to our apprehension; for quantity hath dimensions and bounds, and are, and may be compassed; but there are no bounds of help in him; there is no want upon you, but we may say of you, as of a map, it may be but the breadth of a man's hand, and yet describes countries of vast circumference. Beloved, you are the image of God, it is true, but yet, as in a little map, that hath the world enclosed in it, God is an infinite vastness, far above your capacity; be you as empty as may be, you are but a nutshell, to be filled with the waters of the whole ocean; he is an ocean of goodness, to fill you up with this, is to fill a nutshell with the sea; the Lord is so full, that much of his fulness goes by a flood-gate, as I may so speak, because there is more than will run through thy mill; but still there is as much as will fill it, and keep it in a perpetual motion. Art thou sick or poor? God hath health and wealth in him; art thou in any extremity, he is the God of all consolation; art thou at thy wits ends, his wisdom is infinite; art thou weak, he is omnipotent; there is no disease, nor infirmity, but remedy is most plentiful with him.

But some will say, is the propriety such in God, and is he so abundant to those that have it in him? How cometh it then to pass, that those whose God he is, are so far to seek as they are, for many things that he can supply them with? How many are the complaints of things they want, that God could supply? It seems therefore, that there is not such propriety as that he is, or may be so useful to them, that they have power of it.

Let me tell you, there is nothing in God, wherein he may be useful for the good of his people, but he pours out himself, and is never lacking to them; there is nothing that they complain of, that God doth not afford them out of himself; but it is not good for them, that they should always have those things, which they think that they want? It is no infringing of propriety, to withhold from a man some things, at sometimes, that are his own; as for instance, suppose a man be in a desperate humor to draw his own sword to run himself through; he is but a sorry friend, that will let a man have it to do himself a mischief. Suppose a father of an unthrifty son, hath an estate of his in his hands, because it is his, were it wisdom in the father to let him have the disposing of it, to waste it unprofitably; were it not the property of a wise father to keep it for better uses for his son? There is nothing that the Lord doth hold from his own people, to whom he gave up himself, but that which in the use thereof, would do them more hurt than good.

Yea, but you will say, you do not speak of such things that God might afford that will do us hurt, but to those that he hath given himself unto, for there are wanting many things that would be very good for them; they are very much distressed, and God hath in him that which will ease them; they seek to him for it, and they cannot find redress, though it be in God; if he be so beneficial, then why cannot they have what is good for them out of him?

I answer, there is nothing that is good, but you have it out of him; let me tell you, beloved, you are not always fit to be judges of what is good for you, of those things that God hath in store. A man may be in a distemper, and may judge amiss; you know, when a man is sick of a severe fever, he may exceedingly desire drink, he may shake, and may ask for that which is his own; and yet for all this, it is a loving wife's duty to keep it from him, till the wise physician permit; thus would it be with us. If the Lord should give us those things that we think good, we should soon bring an old house over our heads, as they say.

But some will say, there are things that are good for me, and I have them not. Let them be what you can imagine, and let others judge so as well as you; yet I shall stand to this, and make it good, that there is nothing that is truly good for the faithful, that God withholds from them, to whom he hath given himself; let it be never so special a gift, it is not good at that time, for that person from whom it is withheld; for instance, some will say that the thing I want is, that I have a stony heart, and fain would I have a heart of flesh. I have a dead and wandering spirit in God's service, and fain would I have a settled spirit; fain would I have a cheerful heart, and free spirit; are not these good for me? And yet I seek God for these many times, and having God, they are mine own it seems, because they are in him, and he himself is mine. How can he be said to be my God, and all he is, and hath, to be mine, and I cannot come at these good things which are in him, and are so needful for me?

I answer; that God in giving himself unto persons, gives himself to be communicated unto them at sundry seasons, and in divers kinds and measures, and yet so, that he will be judge of the fitness of the time. The question then will be this; is it softness, or more softness of heart you seek for? Is it a largeness, or more largeness of heart you seek? I mean this, that which you seek and enquire after from God as your God; is it something you have nothing of? Or, is it for more of something you have already? If you say, it is something I have nothing at all of; I have a stony heart, and no softness at all in it; that is false, there can be no seeking of God, where there is no softness, and all hardness; for he must first soften the heart to seek him; but you conceive there is none at all, because the apprehension of that which is wanting, and the want of that which you have not, swallow up that you have. It is more that you would have in respect of measure. But you will say, is it not good for me, though I have a little softness, a little spirituality, and a measure of largeness of spirit, to have more?

I answer that you must distinguish time. God doth not see it better at this instant, that thou shouldst have more softness of heart than thou hast; and this I am bold to affirm, if he judged it were better, that thou shouldst be more spiritual at this instant. Beloved, I speak of a person to whom God gives himself, he would not withhold it all from thee. Mark it well, you will find, that all the spirituality belonging to a believer is the mere gift of God to him, and all at his disposing; and without the leave of the creature, he may make whom he will, partaker of it, and in what measure he thinks meet; so that the creature can enjoy no more of spirituality than God will give him; so the covenant runs, that you may not think that your spirituality depends upon yourselves, and the putting forth of yourselves for it, "a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh; and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." {Ez.36:26,27} "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD; but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."



{Jer.31:31-33} Mark the covenant well, wherever it is, whether in Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36, or Hebrews, chapter 8; where the covenant is again and again recited. Mark it, there is not one clause of it that God will have men do this and that good; he doth not put them upon bringing anything to make it up; for all that is required of the person covenanted with, the Lord is bound to make good all to him. Now if so be the Lord did see more of these spiritual enlargements requisite for thy use; he that hath made such a solemn engagement of himself, for the performance of all that is to be wrought in thee in this covenant, would not withhold that at this instant from thee; thou knowest not what a corrupt use thou, at such a time, would make of them; for some, through more abundance of spirituality and spiritual enlargements, have abused them, to grow more proud and scornful. Paul met with such, to whom, being puffed up with pride, saith he, "who maketh thee to differ from another; and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" {I Cor.4:7} Beloved, your own experience may witness; you shall find some persons, more eminent in spirituality, have more abundance of pride; for example, you shall find some excel in prayer, some in other gifts; what follows? The corruption in the heart of man gathers such corrupt inference from hence, that pride rises in it, that another saint, because he hath a stammering tongue, though equally sound hearted with him, is not fit for such a one's company. God is wise, he knows the measure and proportion that is fit for every member of Jesus Christ, and that he doth not withhold. I speak not this with any intent, but that people should still rise to as much as can be attained, but that they "still press hard to the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ." {Phil.3:14}

Beloved, when we seek God in his own way for increase of any good for soul or body, let us stand to his good pleasure; and, for encouragement, let me tell you, if ever the Lord would have withheld anything for the sinfulness of his creatures, he would have withheld the gift of his own Son, "but while we were enemies, Christ died for us." Would not God spare his own Son, but deliver him up for us all, while such, seeing the delivering up of him, was for the good of his people? Will he detain small things in comparison of him, because of weaknesses in us? Mark the apostle's words, "he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" {Rom.8:32} As if he had said, thou poor wretch, wantest such and such spirituality, thou seekest and canst not find, and by-and-by crieth out, that such and such sins hinder God, that he will not give thee such grace as thou needest; and at last you question, whether he gave thee Christ, or no; nay, when thou wert viler than now thou art, thy vileness did not hinder, but he freely gave his Son for thee; much less shall it bar from thee those spiritual gifts that God intends to give thee.

Here objections start up, this is the way to make persons slack duties, and be careless; if we preached, that God will not give till we mend ourselves, and leave our sins, is not this a far better way to put men upon it, than thus to preach? Let me tell you, we must not be more wise than God, that all that the creature hath, might appear to be from his grace, and so he have the praise of the glory of it. I say again, it is not sinfulness in creatures that shall hinder God's communicating so much of his Spirit, as he seeth useful; and he will take care they shall not take a licentious liberty to go on in sin, or neglect seeking him, because they know it is not their seeking that makes God answer for what they want; for it is not your reforming that gets God to communicate more to you; but he doth it merely for his own sake, from his mere motion, out of his mere compassion, the riches of which was purchased by the blood of Christ. This is the only spring and fountain that brings forth to you the fulness of God in such measure as you have; as he is yours; so, whatsoever in him is fit for you in season, he shall cease to be his own, when he ceases to be yours; and therefore, beloved, I beseech you, that you will not stumble at God himself, as if he were so humorous, that every little thing, {not that any sin is, in its own nature, little, but comparatively,} every infirmity and failing, should make him pull his hands into his bosom, and refuse to give his grace. The Lord from all eternity determined what to give to every saint, and had every act of every believer, before his eyes; so that, if they would have been provocations to him to keep his gifts, he should never have bestowed any upon him. But I must tell you, it is the foundation of all our comfort in all our failings in this life, that there is nothing that we enjoy from God, but what was appointed us before; and no sin is committed, but what was from eternity, before him; and, if any sin should have hindered him, he would never have set down so

fully and graciously what he would do; so that if he hath already manifested the greatness of his love by communicating himself to you; assure yourselves, this being established, nothing shall hinder the communication of anything whatsoever, that may make for your good. Well, let us go a little further and consider how he becomes the God of people; for I must tell you, that for lack of clear distinguishing between these two things, how he becomes theirs, and how he is to be theirs, occasions a great deal of confusion in the minds of men, for these two go all for one; but you shall see their difference, and the different principle from whence they flow.

1. How doth God come to be the God of people? You will say, this is of great use, it is worth the hearing, let it cost what it will, to have God for my own; but, I say, there is no more treasure in him, for our use, than it is free to; the gift of him, for our own God, is as cheap as it is rich; he never looks the creature should bring anything to procure it, but we partake of this merely and properly from the pleasure of his own will. I say, there is originally and efficiently, no other motive, or nothing concurring to make him our God; but only that he would do it simply for his own sake; therefore it is so. Beloved, look upon the creatures; God gives his image only to the sons of men; "let us make man after our own image;" how doth man become partaker of it, more than the rest of the creatures? You may plainly see there is nothing in man himself that procures this privilege to him; man was made but of one common lump with other creatures, even of the same materials that toads and frogs. Now, that which was the cause, why man had the image of God, and no other creature, is the cause why believers have God given to be their God; and the reason of both is his good pleasure. It is true, there is a propriety of land many times made over unto persons, in respect of amiableness or desert, conceived to be in them, and so it is conferred unto them; but in God's giving himself to the sons of men, there could not be such motives in them. If anything could be a motive to the Lord, it must be the most excellent thing the creature hath since the fall; as fasting, prayer, mourning, weeping, self-denial, mortification, cleansing of themselves, amending, and the like; but it was impossible, beloved, there should be any motive, out of any of all these, for God to give himself over to people; for all these performances, and whatever else are in man, are but branches that issue from this main root, God's being their God. If they be spiritual gifts, they issue out of this principle; there is no man that believes, fasts, prays, and mourns, in a truly gracious manner, but God is first his God, and, being so, communicates these things to him. How can that then be a motive to God to communicate himself, that is not in man till he hath done it; and indeed, is but the issue of it? So then, it is impossible that God should fetch any argument, or motive, to make himself ours, from what we do; and if we could do any such thing, yet there cannot be any moving power in such performances, to obtain him for our God; for in the very best of them there is unrighteousness, there is filthiness; nay, the prophet saith, "that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags;" sweet motives to prevail with God, for such a gift as to communicate himself! No beloved, it is not what we do, but what he in his own thoughts hath freely determined to do for us.

But you will say, Christ makes God to be our God. I answer, beloved, in some sense, that is true; but, as I said before, originally, he doth not; give me leave to open this clearly unto you; for I must tell you, that Christ himself is particularly careful, not to take to himself that which belongs unto his Father; nor should we give to Christ himself that which belongs unto God peculiarly, as giving Christ himself unto us. Christ saith, "give to Caesar, the things that are Caesar's; and to God, the things that are God's;" and this holds as true between God and Christ, as Mediator; give unto God the things that are his, and to Christ the things that are his; for our Saviour, in John 17:4, saith, speaking to the Father in prayer, "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." What work was that? See verse 21, "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us;" as much as to say, that thou mightest communicate thyself to them. Christ professes, that it is the work that his Father hath given him to do; he did not put himself upon it originally, but the Father put him upon it. The truth is, the mere good pleasure of God, contriving and ordaining this communicating of himself, was the ground that Christ was sent into the world, that he was conceived in the womb of a virgin, &c., and the Lord by the righteousness of Christ hath actually brought all the benefits of the gospel upon us, to which end, Christ hath done this

work; but the first foundation of it, was the thing by which he was Christ and Mediator; and therefore he could not be the original of that eternal decree of God to communicate himself to us, for the execution whereof he was sent into the world. The schools have a rule, that the end is first intended, though it be last in execution; so this, that God would communicate himself to the sons of men, being the end for which Christ was sent; though, till he had, by virtue of his death, made way, there was no actual communion, yet still it was the end of his coming into the world; it was in the mind of God, before the means was in being. Therefore, if you will have God to be your God, you must not think, that such and such things will make him yours. Nothing will, but his own free motion from himself by his Son.

2. There is a way by which God is found to be the God of his people; now these things being confounded together, put people into a labyrinth, thinking the way to find God, and to get him, is all one; now, though it is the mere good pleasure of God himself, that bestows himself upon us; yet he is pleased to chalk out a way, whereby he may be our God; and that we may find him to be so, we must meet him in those ways he useth to be met in.

But you will say, how doth God usually manifest himself, and how is he found of his people to be theirs?

I answer, there is an efficient and a passive instrument of finding him out; the way of finding out of God efficiently to be our God, is the Spirit of the Lord, acquainting men with the mind of the Lord, he is the efficient; all the world is not able to work any impression upon the spirit of a man, that the Lord is his God; only the Spirit of the Lord must persuade the spirit of man, to receive this principle; it is true indeed, he doth it according to the word of grace, and speaks no more to the spirit of a man, but what is in that; but the word doth not of itself work this impression, that God is my, or thy God, but it is wrought by the Spirit.

What serves all the ordinances for, you will say? Is not here a crying down of them? There will be still this scandal cast upon us; but let me tell you, there is a most comfortable use of them, though they serve not such high purposes as these, to beget, find out and reveal to the spirits of men, the things that concern God; yet, besides the efficient revelation of God, to be our God from the Spirit alone, there is a passive instrument, by which the Lord makes himself known to be the God of his people.

God makes himself known passively to be the God of his people, by the word of his grace, and faith laying hold upon it revealed, and more subordinately in prayer, fasting, receiving of the Lord's supper, and such ordinances, so far as they are mixed with faith. Now give me leave, in a few words, to communicate unto you the full use and utmost extent of God's thoughts, concerning the ordinances that he hath propounded, how far forth he would have the creature look upon them, and be put upon the use of them, so far as they are useful. Know therefore, that all these ordinances are but passive ways of conveying this great gift, the knowledge of God to be our God; I mean more plainly thus; these are only of and in themselves, empty channels, through which the Spirit of the Lord brings from God himself the spring; these riches and conveys the same into the spirit of a man. Look as a channel dug in a dry ground is the way through which the spring conveys its water unto a cistern; the channel itself communicates none of its own, only it is a passage, through which the spring conveys its water; so are all the ordinances, even faith itself, prayer, and all other services, they are but channels, through which the Spirit of the Lord passes, and brings from the Lord himself {the spring and fountain} the revelation of God to be our God. In all the rest of the gifts of God, which he hath so freely bestowed, never a gift of God's Spirit procures anything of its own; our faith, fasting, and prayer, have nothing of their own, but as the Lord hath been pleased to make them to be passages to convey himself to the sons of men, and so they are to be made use of by them. And indeed, beloved, this is the load-stone, to provoke persons to the use of all ordinances; God hath ranked them together, that he hath so much, and so often promised through them to convey himself. You are "kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation;" as if he should have said, the Lord conveys himself, and the manifestation of his own salvation, through our believing; the Spirit of the Lord passing through the ministry of the gospel, as the breath of man passes through a trumpet; the

trumpet is the gospel, the breath is the Spirit of the Lord; the trumpet adds nothing to the breath. Now know, beloved, so far as you will attend the ordinances, because God calls out to them, and because you have heard the Lord promises to bestow such things upon you in them, so far you shall attend them according to his pleasure; but when you ascend so high, that ordinances get things, then you rob the Lord, and give more to them than God hath given; now, though they have no efficiency of their own, in that nature I have spoken, yet there is good cause for all God's own people to esteem very highly of, and to be joyful, and to long much after ordinances, and make much of them; for the Lord hath made his promises to be found of them, and to be with them in ordinances. "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." {Ps.50:15} And here, by the way, know from hence, what is the expectation of believers themselves, which they ought to have of the Lord, for such things, when they come to such ordinances, that so, when we attend the Lord in them, we may find him in them. In Ezekiel you find, there was a constant motion in the wheels, but it was because there was a spirit stirring in them; there is no motion in the heart of man, nor ordinances, but as the Spirit of the Lord is in them; the Lord hath promised to meet with us in ordinances, or else they would be as dry as anything in the world; therefore as the poor man lay at the beautiful gate of the temple, not because the gate would relieve him, but because it was a place of concourse, where honorable men resorted, from whom he might have alms; so in the ministry, fasting, prayer, and all other services, there is the gate of the temple of the Lord, the place God makes usually his resort, and appoints, to give the meeting. Therefore in expectation from the word of his grace, that we may find him in ordinances, we resort to them. Now, what derogation is there all this while to them, while we make them but thus passive? The richest treasure in the world may come to a man through the poorest vessel; the treasure is never the worse, because the vessel is poor. It is no matter of what price the means of conveyance is, so that the thing we desire to be conveyed to us by it, only we must not give it that, which is above its due; to ascribe the obtaining of these things to prayer, and ordinances; that is, to make gods of them. If we think that anything shall move the Lord, but his bowels in Christ, you invert the course of the gospel. The Lord saith, "I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for my name sake;" so all that which God doth to men, is done to them for his own sake; he will not be so much bound to any creature, as to fetch the least motive from it, to do good to it; look therefore, as you would speed, wait upon the Lord, where he saith, you shall.

And this shall be encouragement sufficient to wait upon all ordinances, where the Lord appoints; that he will, for his own sake, give a gracious answer, and bestow all good things upon you, that you stand in need of in them; this is motive sufficient, I say, to stir you up to attend upon them, and yet not make gods of them; to ascribe that to them, which belongs alone to God, who does all ordinarily through ordinances; it is the only way to disappoint you of your hope, when you expect help from them.

But what is all this to fasting, will you say? If you consider the nature of fasting aright, you will find there is nothing more proper for this day, than this thing, God to be thy God, to keep thee from fear. What is the end of fasting, but this, to get a prop to support from sinking, by reason of approaching evils? Who knows, whether the Lord will repent and leave a blessing behind, saith Joel, when he proclaimed the day of a fast? Then to find the Lord with his hands full of blessings, is the end of a fast. Now, if you will find the Lord your God, you shall find the utmost that you can in fasting; for in him you will find that which will support you, when the greatest extremities grow upon you. Therefore, I have no more to say to you, beloved, but only to commend this work to the grace of God, and to the power of his Spirit, that is able to fasten it upon your spirits, for your everlasting comfort.