THE PATH OF WISDOM.

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cause, the Protector of our wronged innocency, to whom we may commit our way, and to whom we may trust to bring forth our righteousness as the light. When men condemn us unjustly, this is our comfort, "it is God that justifies."

Again, David says, "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer." His heart was enlarged with holy joy and comfort, his condition was enlarged by being brought out of his distresses. The experience we have had of God's goodness to us in enlarging us when we have been in distress, is a great encouragement to our faith and hope for the future.

God, by the Psalmist, here reasons with sinners to bring them to repentance. They that go on in the neglect of God and his worship, and in contempt of the kingdom of Christ and his government, let them consider what they do: they debase themselves. Sinners are charged with changing the glory of God into shame. Rom. i. 23. All wilful sinners do so by disobeying the commands of his law, despising the offers of his grace, and giving that affection and service to the creature which is due to God only. Those that profane God's holy name, that ridicule his word and ordinances, and while they profess to know him, in works deny him, do what in them lies to turn his glory into shame. You put a cheat upon yourselves, you love vanity, and seek after leasing, or that which is a lie. You are yourselves vain and lying, and you love to be so. Or you set your hearts upon that which will prove at last but vanity and a lie: they that love the world, love vanity and seek lies. The world will deceive them, and so ruin them.

Again David shews them the peculiar favour which God has for good people, the special protection they are under, and the singular privileges to which they are entitled. This comes in here as a reason, why they should not oppose or persecute him that is godly, or think to run him down: it is at their peril, if they offend one of these little ones whom God has set apart for himself, Matthew xviii. 6. God reckons, that those who touch them touch the apple of his eye, and

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he will make their persecutors to know it sooner or later. They have an interest in heaven, God will hear them, and therefore let none dare to do them an injury, for God will hear their cry, and plead their cause, Exod. xxii. 23. God in like manner set apart the Lord Jesus for himself, that Merciful One, and those that attempt to hinder the advancement of his kingdom will certainly be baffled, for the Father heareth him always. "The Lord hath set apart him that is godly," every particular godly man for himself calling him from darkness into light by the special disposals of his Providence and operation of his Grace. Godly men are God's separated, sealed ones; he knows them that are his, distinguishes them with uncommon favours, "and they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts in that day when I make up my jewels." Mal. iii. 17. Know this: let godly people know it, and let them never draw themselves away from him to whom they thus belong: they are purified unto him as a peculiar people; let wicked people know it, and take heed how they hurt those whom God protects. Again, David says, "the Lord will hear when I call unto him." We would think ourselves happy if we had the ear of an earthly prince; and is it not worth while to gain the ear of the King of kings? Let us know this and forsake lying vanities for our own mercies.

Again David warns them against sin, and exhorts them both to impress their minds with a horror of it. And to reason themselves from it; he says, "Stand in awe and sin not." Be converted, and in order thereunto consider and fear. One good remedy against sin is to stand in awe. Be moved in opposition to carelessness and worldly security; always keep up a holy reverence of the glory and majesty of God, and a holy dread of his wrath and curse, and dare not to provoke him. One good means of preventing sin and preserving an holy awe is to be frequent and serious in communion with our own hearts; you have a great deal to say to them, they may be spoken with at any time. A thinking man is in a fair way to be a wise and a good man. Commune with your own hearts; that is examine them by serious self-reflection, that you may acquaint your-

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selves with them, and amend what is amiss in them: employ them by solemn pious meditations, let your thoughts fasten upon that which is good, and keep close to it. Consider your ways, in order to the doing of this work to good purpose. Choose a solitary time; commune when you lie awake upon your beds. Before you turn to go to sleep at night (as some even of the heathen philosophers have directed) examine your consciences what you have done that day amiss, that you may repent of it. When you awake in the night, meditate upon God, and the things that belong to your peace. David did himself practise what he here counsels others to do, when he said, "When I remember thee on my bed." Compose yourselves into a serious frame; be still. When you have asked conscience a question, be silent and wait for an answer; even in unquiet times keep your spirits calm and quiet.

Again, he thus advises them; "Offer to God the sacrifice of righteousness." We must not only cease to do evil but learn to do well. They who are rebels would soon return to their allegiance, if they would but worship God aright: and those that know the concerns that lie between them and God, will be glad of the Mediator, Jesus Christ the Lord, to intercede for them. It is required here, from every one of us, That we serve him, offer sacrifices to him, our own selves first, which are our best sacrifices. But they must be sacrifices of righteousness; that is good works: all the fruits of the reigning love of God and our neighbour, and all the instances of a religious conversation, which are better than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices. When we follow the holy example of our blessed Lord who was made a propitiation for sinners, by dealing out our souls to those who are diseased in their souls as well as in their bodies, by a self-denying devotedness to the will of God, and by going about doing good, we shall then know what it is to offer the sacrifices of righteousness. Let all your devotions come from an upright heart; let all your alms be sacrifices of righteousness, God will not accept the sacrifices of the unrighteous, they are an abomination, Isaiah i. 15. When we make conscience of offering the sacrifices

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of righteousness, then we are welcome to put our trust in the Lord. Serve God without any distrust of him, or any fear of losing by him. Honour him by trusting in him only, and not in your wealth or in an arm of flesh, but in his providence, and lean not to your own understanding; in his grace, and go not about to establish your own righteousness. We should preach to ourselves the doctrine of the provoking nature of sin, the lying vanity of the world, and the unspeakable happiness of God's people, and press upon ourselves the duties of fearing God, conversing with our own hearts, and offering spiritual sacrifices; and in praying over them, beg of God to impart to us grace thus to think and thus to do.

Here follows the remainder of this Psalm.

6. "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. 7. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. 8. I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou LORD only makest me dwell in safety."

We have here the foolish wish of worldly people—"There be many that say, who will shew us any good?" What good they meant is intimated here; it was the increase of their corn and wine; all they desired was plenty of the wealth of this world, but there are these things amiss in this wish. 1st, They inquired in general who would make them happy, but did not apply themselves to God who alone can, and so exposed themselves to be ill advised, and shewed they would rather be beholden to any than to God, for they would willingly live without Him. 2nd, They inquired for good that might be seen, seeming good, sensible good, and not for the good things out of sight, which are the true objects of faith. The source of idolatry was a desire of gods that they might see, therefore they worshipped the sun; but as we must be taught to worship an unseen God, so to seek an unseen good, 2 Cor. iv. 18. We look with an eye of faith further than we can see with an eye of sense. 3rd, They inquired for any good, not for the chief good: if it be

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outward good, present good, partial good: good meat, good drink, a good trade, a good estate, and what are all these worth without a good God, a good heart? Any good will serve the turn of the most of men but a child of God will not be put off so. This way, this wish of worldly persons is their folly, and yet many there be that join in it; and so will their doom be, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things."

Mark the wise choice which religious people make. David and his pious friends disagreed from the manners and way of the worldly. Their prayer was, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." The wealth of the world would never make a portion for their souls, and therefore they could not take up with it. The words, "Well done, good and faithful servant," are beyond measure more sweet than "soul take thine ease," for the former is the voice of our great Lord, recompensing the faithful; the latter, of the worldly soul satisfying itself in its fancied wealth. What follows the former, but the joy of the Lord? What follows the latter but the loss of the soul? He that is not like to the Lord, our example, shall never be heir together with him. See his side, temples, hands, feet, wounded with the thorns and nails, his face ghastly and spitted upon, his body streaming with the bloody sweat, his head drooping, his soul heavy, even to the death. See then the man of the world, merry, soft, delicate, adorned, his face never wrinkled with sorrow, his heart never humbled by afflictions; what resemblance is here? rather what contrarieties? Ease slayeth the fool. Be not deceived: no man can follow Christ much less reach him, without taking up his cross, a portion of his sorrows. And if none shall reign with Christ but those that suffer with him, what shall come of those who live at ease in this world? Now David and his friends agree in their choice of God's favour as their happiness, that is it which in their account is better than life and all the comforts of life.

This is that which pious persons most earnestly seek after; this is the breathing of their souls, "Lord lift

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thou up the light of thy countenance upon us;" most are for other things, but they are for this. Good people, as they are distinguished by their practices, so they are by their prayers, by the faith and fervency of them; they whom God has set apart, pray a prayer which though others may speak the words of, they only offer up in sincerity.

God many a time put gladness into the heart of David, not only supported and refreshed him but filled him with joy unspeakable, and therefore that is it which he would seek all the days of his life. When God puts grace in the heart, he puts gladness in the heart; nor is any joy comparable to that which the children of God have in the communications of the divine favour: no, not the joy of harvest, of a plentiful harvest, when the corn and wine increaseth. This is gladness in the heart, inward, solid, substantial joy; the mirth of worldly people is but a flash, a shadow, "even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness." Prov. xiv. 13. Now is the day of trial—Let your Saviour see how much of his bitter cup you can partake of, then you shall see how much of his glory he can afford you. Be content to drink of his vinegar and gall, and you shall drink new wine with Him in his kingdom. True joy is God's gift, "not as the world giveth." John xiv. 27. The saints have no reason to envy worldly persons their mirth and joy, but should pity them rather, for they may know better, and will not.

David says here, "I will lay me down in peace and sleep, for thou Lord only makest me to dwell in safety." Though we are alone, yet we are not alone, for God is with us: though we have no guards to attend us, the Lord alone is sufficient to protect us; he can do it himself when all other defences fail. When the Christian enjoys the light of God's countenance, he can enjoy himself, his soul returns to God, and reposes itself in him as its rest. He knows Jesus Christ in whom he has believed, and he believes that his Lord will send the Holy Spirit the Comforter to support and to bless him. He fears no disturb-

*** This Tract will serve as a Family Sermon.

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ance from his enemies, sleeps quiet and is very secure, because God, who keeps Israel, neither slumbers nor sleeps. When he comes to sleep the sleep of death, and to make his bed in the grave; he will then, with good old Simeon, "depart in peace:" being assured that God will receive his soul to be safe with himself, and that his body also shall be made to dwell in safety in the grave. It is written, "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how." Mark iv. 26, 27. So a good man having by faith and prayer cast his care upon God, he sleeps and resteth night and day, and is very easy, leaving it to his God to perform all things for him: welcome his holy will.

Let us with a holy contempt of the wealth and pleasure of this world, as insufficient to make us happy, earnestly seek the favour of God, and pleasingly comfort ourselves in that favour: and with a holy indifferency about the issue of all our worldly concerns, let us commit ourselves and all our affairs to the conduct and custody of the Divine Providence, and be satisfied that all shall be made to work for good to us, if we continue with an abiding persevering faith, in the love of God.

THE END.

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