

Song v. ; and what influence it had upon the daughters of Jerusalem, their beginning to think much of him, and seek after him also, Song vi. 1. O then, commend him to your families, your children, and your neighbours.

2. By adorning the gospel, and walking worthy of him, and wearing his livery. It is a master's honour and credit to have a good servant, and well arrayed ; they think much of the master that hath such a servant. And how does it proclaim the praises of Christ, when they that profess him are eminent for piety ? 1 Pet. ii. 9.

3. In a word, " Let your light so shine before men, that others, seeing your good works, may glorify God," and think much of Christ. O let your hearts be still thinking of him, your life praising, and your tongue speaking of him ! Here is a fountain for spiritual discourse ; if you have an opportunity of conversing with any, concerning the great solemnity you have been witnesses to here ; or if any ask you, Where was such or such a minister's text ? here is a fair occasion for spiritual converse ; for, you cannot, in a manner, tell them this text, without asking them a question, " What think ye of Christ ?"

SERMON CIX.—CXV.

THE PREGNANT PROMISE, WITH HER ISSUE ; OR, THE CHILDREN OF PROMISE BROUGHT FORTH, AND DESCRIBED.¹

" Now, we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise."—GAL. iv. 28.

THIS text presents a subject that concerns all here present, and particularly believing communicants. The sacrament of the Lord's supper is a seal of the covenant of grace ; the covenant of grace is a covenant of promise ; the promise of the covenant is the prolific

(1) This subject was discussed in seven sermons, mostly preached on sacramental occasions. The first two were delivered at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper at Torphichen, on the Sabbath evening, and Monday, June 19th and 20th. The third at the sacrament at Portmoak, on Monday, July 17th. The fourth probably at Dunfermline, July 23d. The three last at the sacramental solemnity of Glendovan, July 31st, all in the year 1726.

womb that bears and brings forth all God's children, and so the children of God are the children of promise. As it concerns us all therefore to inquire to what family we belong, and whose children we are ; so believers in particular, or believing communicants, upon this subject may, in order to the increase of their faith, love, and holy evangelical obedience, find themselves distinguished from the rest of the world, by that sovereign grace that is manifested in the covenant of promise. And upon the back of such a great solemnity, it may not be unsuitable to point them out with a *now*, or give them their proper name and character in the words of our text: " Now, we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise."

As the law and the gospel differ, especially in this, as well as in other things, that whereas in short the law is a word of precept, the gospel is a word of promise ; so the covenant of works and of grace differ in this, that whereas in the covenant of works, all the benefits thereof depend upon man's fulfilling of a precept ; in the covenant of grace, all depend upon God's fulfilling of a promise in Christ. Hence the covenant of works is called the law, and the covenant of grace the promise, particularly in this epistle, chap. iii. 18. Hence also, in opposition to all these that are under the covenant of works, believers in Christ, who are brought within the bond of the covenant of grace, are called the children of promise: " Now, we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." Concerning these two covenants of works and grace, the apostle elegantly discourses in the preceding verses, particularly from ver. 21, and downward ; where having upbraided the Galatians for desiring to be under the law, and so for discovering their folly and weakness, in suffering themselves to be drawn away from the gospel-doctrine of justification, and to be deprived of their freedom from the bondage of the law, he asks them a question, " Do you not hear the law ?" *q. d.* How ignorantly do you hold yourselves bound to fulfil the law, and look for eternal life thereby ; while, though you hear, you do not understand the law, but mistake the end and design of it, not considering Christ to be the end of the law, but supposing that the very observance of it, even since the fall of Adam, does give life, and justify ? This ignorance was, to the Jews, as a vail before their eyes in the reading of the law, 2 Cor. iii. 14 ; yea, this ignorance is the vail by which thousands, that are called Christians, are blinded. Now, from ver. 22, the apostle shews how their liberty from the law, was prefigured in the family of Abraham ; where

notice the narration, the explication, the confirmation, and the application.

1. The narration of the history, ver. 22, 23. Here Ishmael is said to be born after the flesh; that is by the strength of nature, and according to the fleshly counsel of Sarah, when she substitute Hagar into her own room: but Isaac was by promise; that is, though according to the order of nature, yet not by the strength of nature, but by virtue of the promise of God.

2. The explication of this history, ver. 24—27, “Which things are an allegory, says the apostle, for these are the two covenants;” that is, not merely the two different dispensations of the covenant of grace, the old legal, and the new evangelical dispensation; but the two covenants themselves, namely, that of works made with the first Adam, and all his seed in him, promising life upon condition of man’s own perfect obedience to the will of God, Gen. ii. 17, and that of grace, made with the second Adam, and with his seed in him, promising eternal life, and all spiritual blessings, upon condition and consideration of his undergoing the curse, and yielding perfect obedience to the law in their room, Isa. liii. 10, 11, Rom. v. 6, 21. Hence the apostle expressly calls them two covenants. Though Israel, even at Sinai, was under a dispensation of the covenant of grace, however dark, as is evident from the preface to the ten commands, and many other arguments; yet, that there was also an addition, repetition, and promulgation of the covenant of works at Sinai, is not only plain from the concurring testimony of many orthodox writers, but from manifold scriptural accounts thereof. The apostle here tells us, Gal. iii. 18, 19, that the law, or covenant of works, was added because of transgression, till the seed should come, to whom the promise was made; it was added to be subservient to the other, and for furthering the ends thereof. This is plain also from the context here, where the apostle is shewing that the children of the Sinai covenant are excluded from the eternal inheritance, as Ishmael was from Canaan, the type of it, ver. 30, “Cast out the bond-woman and her son; for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.” But this could never be said of the children of the covenant of grace, whether under the old or new dispensation thereof; whereas the children of the legal covenant, or covenant of works, whereof there was a repetition at Sinai, have been always under a sentence of exclusion ever since Adam fell, and under bondage to death and the curse; therefore it is the

two covenants, that of works and of grace, that the apostle is here setting in opposition to one another; the one is prefigured by Hagar, and the other by Sarah. The covenant of works is here compared to Ishmael, that was born after the flesh; the covenant of grace to Isaac, who was a child of promise, produced by the Spirit of God working mightily in Abraham and Sarah, and breathing in the promise. Here is an allegory, a great mystery, that the people think not of, when they read of Ishmael and Isaac. Now Hagar, which is the law, or covenant of works, is said to gender unto bondage; because it makes them bond-men, that look to be saved and justified thereby; and so it is called the ministration of death, 2 Cor. iii. 6: whereas the gospel, and the new covenant, is a dispensation of life and liberty, being the channel in which the Spirit of life does run, chap. iii. 2. And while Jerusalem that now is, is said to be in bondage with her children; it shews the misery of the Jewish church, by refusing Christ, and establishing their own righteousness, seeking to be saved by the deeds of the law, and so being in bondage, and depriving herself of the heavenly inheritance. As Hagar then signifies the law, so does Ishmael all legalists, and self-justiciaries, who look to be saved by the law: they that have not fled to Christ for refuge and righteousness, but remain under the law, they are Ishmalites, and in spiritual bondage to sin, and legal bondage unto death and wrath, according to the tenor of the law they are under. But now, "Jerusalem, which is above, says the apostle, is free, which is the mother of us all," ver. 26. Here Paul shews what was figured by Sarah, namely, the new Jerusalem; that is, the catholic church, Heb. xii. 22, 23, and Rev. xxi. 2. By the new Jerusalem, then, understand all the invisible church, whereof Jerusalem was a type in many respects; hence said to be ABOVE; because all that are within the bond of the new covenant are from above; their election, redemption, effectual vocation, justification, sanctification, and all is from above; and they dwell above in heaven by faith, according to the measure of the Spirit of faith. This Jerusalem that is above is *free*, says the apostle, in opposition to the bondage that the Ishmalites and unbelievers are under; they are freed from the bondage of sin, death, and the curse of the law. Now, this Jerusalem, or the church, is said to be the mother of us all; because the ministry of the word, which is committed to the church's keeping, and which is compared to seed and milk, 1 Pet. i. 23, and ii. 2, is that by which children are brought forth to God in her:

hence of Zion it is said, "This man and that man was born there," Psal. lxxxvii. 4, 5, 6.

3. The confirmation is next, by the apostle's adducing the testimony of the prophets; "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate, than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord," Isa. liv. 1. The Christian church is called barren; because by the virtue and strength of nature, it bears no children to God, no more than Sarah did to Abraham: but when the Spirit of Christ comes to impregnate the word and ordinances with almighty efficacy, then a numerous seed is brought forth to the Lord Jesus, by virtue of the new-covenant promise. And so,

4. The application of it follows in the words of the text; where the apostle shews, that as Sarah was a figure of the church catholic, so Isaac was a figure of all true believers, and children of God; "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise."

In which words you may notice the transition, the compellation, and the description.

1. A transition in the particle *now*, or *therefore*, importing, the apostle's proceeding next to make an application of what he had been saying to the case in hand, and adapting of it to their present circumstances. *Now, q. d.*, After what hath been said, let it be considered, that this is a matter that concerns you and me, therefore let us bring it home to ourselves.

2. A compellation, BRETHREN; intimating, that there is a spiritual fraternity and brotherhood betwixt all true believers: they are all brethren by the Father's side: for they have all one father, even the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are also all brethren by the mother's side; for, they all lie in the same womb of the church. And they are all brethren by Christ's side; for they have all the self-same elder brother, Jesus Christ; begotten with the same incorruptible seed of the word; and fed at the same table, with the same spiritual food. This spiritual brotherhood far exceeds the natural, even as far as God's Fatherhood towards us, exceeds the natural fatherhood among men.

3. A description, particularly of believers, in a suitableness to the former doctrine; "We, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." Here they are described in relation to the promise, and in allusion unto Isaac.

(1.) In relation to the promise ; “ We are the children of promise.” By the promise here you may understand the covenant of grace, called the covenant of promise ; and so you may take it either for the promise made to Christ, such as that, “ He shall see his seed ;” or the promise made to Abraham, “ I will be thy God, and the God of thy seed :” or the promise made to the church, that “ being barren, she should bear many children,” as it is in the preceding verse. Now believers are called the children of promise, not only because they believe the promise, but because they are made the children of God by virtue of God’s promise.

(2.) In allusion to Isaac ; or they are described to be the children of the promise, in the manner that Isaac was, in that he was born to Abraham, not by the strength of nature, but by the virtue of God’s promise : as Isaac was not born by natural power, but by the mere promise and power of God ; so believers are children of the promise, being born, as Isaac, not by the power of flesh and blood, but by the power of God putting virtue in the promise. The further explication I refer to the prosecution of the following doctrine :—

OBSERV. That all the children of God, or true believers, are, like Isaac, the children of promise.

I shall not enlarge the proof of so clear a point. You may read what our apostle says, to this same purpose, Rom. ix. 7, 8, where the children of the promise, such as Isaac was, are opposed to the children of the flesh. The promise is the believer’s parent, by which he is begotten to a lively hope, and made a partaker of the divine nature, 2 Pet. i. 4. When a poor soul is converted, it is the promise that does the business ; the power and efficacy of the promise, in its performance, does change and renew the heart ; James i. 18, “ Of his own will begat he us, by the word of truth ;” that is by the word of promise.

The method we lay down, for illustrating this doctrinal observation, through divine assistance, shall be the following :—

- I. I would open up the promise, whereof believers are the children.
- II. Open up this character of their being the children of promise ; and inquire how they are so.
- III. I would state the comparison, or run the parallel betwixt

them and Isaac ; and so show, that as Isaac was, so they are the children of promise.

IV. I would offer some grounds of the doctrine, both with reference to the prolific virtue of the promise for begetting children to God, and also with reference to the blest will and pleasure of the Promiser, why he will have all his children to be the children of promise.

V. Deduce inferences for application.

I. The First Head proposed is, To open up the promise whereof believers are the children. Before I proceed to this, there are two things I would mention, which this doctrine doth presuppose.

1. In that some are the children of promise by grace, it supposes that all are the children of wrath by nature, Eph. ii. 3. Because of the breach and violation of the law of works in Adam, we forfeited the promise of life, and incurred the threatening of death, according to the tenor of the covenant, "Do and live," and if thou do not, thou shalt die : and being children of disobedience, we are children of the curse, and not of the promise ; for, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 10. There is the sad state wherein all Adam's natural offspring are since the fall : we are Ishmaelites ; children of the bond-woman ; born after the flesh ; under the curse ; and in bondage to sin, Satan, death, and hell ; aliens to the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise, Eph. ii. 12. It is true, there was a promise of life in the covenant of works, under which we are by nature ; but it being upon condition of our perfect and personal obedience, now impossible, it can give no relief to the awakened conscience, but leaves all, whose eyes are open, to everlasting despair, if they get not a view of the covenant, and better promise. Therefore,

2. In that some are the children of promise, it supposes that surely there is another promise, according to which God proposes to deal with some of the children of men ; a promise, not built upon the silly foundation of any mere man's personal obedience, but a promise established on a better foundation, and standing fast in another head ; and it is called a promise of life in Christ Jesus, 2 Tim. i. 1. And that, "not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began," ver. 9, compared with Tit. i. 2. Not

according to the tenor of the covenant of works, for, while sinners look to that covenant, nothing is to be seen there but consuming fire, nothing to be heard but thunder and threatenings, nothing to be expected but death and vengeance; therefore man is under no dispensation but that of a terrible threatening till the promise in Christ appear. There is a fourfold capacity wherein man hath had to do with God.

(1.) As a commanding God; men, even as creatures, being obliged to yield obedience to the great Creator's law and commandment, which was engraven on their hearts, in the original make and constitution of our first parents, when they dropt out of his creating hand.

(2.) As a covenanting God; I mean in the covenant of works, which God entered into with man, as a covenant of life and death, upon his doing or not doing what God commanded.

(3.) As a threatening God, upon the violation of that covenant: and this is the capacity wherein all mankind have to do with God; they that see God out of Christ with their eyes open, while they are in a natural state, can see him no other ways than arrayed with threatenings and wrath, until he please to discover himself.

(4.) As a promising God, upon a better foundation than the first covenant, even his promise in Jesus Christ, before the world began. Now, there is no dealing with God for eternal life and salvation, unless he shew himself to be God in a promise.

Having premised these things, I come now to speak a little concerning the promise, whereof believers are the children. And, in general, the promise is the same with the covenant of grace, in opposition to the covenant of works: or, the promise is the same with the gospel, in opposition to the law; hence the promise and the gospel are made one and the same thing in this epistle, Gal. iii. 8; "and hence the promise and the law are set in opposition to one another, verse 18. But, more particularly for opening up the promise, whereof believers are children; we may consider, concerning the promise, 1. The Subject, or Author of it. 2. The matter of it. 3. The nature of it. 4. The object of it.

1st, The Subject of this promise, or whose promise it is. And,

1. It is the promise of God, even God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; therefore called the promise of God, Gal. iii. 21. Indeed all the divine perfections are engaged for the accomplishment thereof that our faith and hope might be in God. God the Father is the

great author, the grand contriver, and original fountain of the covenant; "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began," Titus i. 2. And the great promise of the covenant is called the promise of the Father, Acts i. 4. And hence the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is said to bless us with all spiritual blessings, Eph. i. 3.

2. It is the promise of Christ; he also is the promiser; and therefore, when he left his people, and went out of this world, he opened his mouth to them in manifold promises, John xv., xvi., xvii., chapters. And hence also he invites sinners to himself, by the encouragement of a promise; "Come to me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Matt. xi. 28.

3. It is the promise of the Spirit; hence he is called the Spirit of promise, Eph. i. 13, both because he is promised, and because he is the promiser: and what are all the promises of the new covenant but the language of the Holy Ghost, the voice of the Spirit, the Spirit of the Father, and of the Son, whose voice we are called to hear? And hence, in the epilogue of all the epistles to the seven churches of Asia, Rev. ii. and iii. chapters, the conclusory promises are all backed with this advertisement, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." And again,

4. It is the promise of God in Christ, by the Holy Ghost. That it is the promise of God in Christ, is plain from Gal. iii. 17, where it is called the covenant confirmed of God in Christ; and 2 Tim. i. 1, "The promise of life, which is Christ Jesus;" and given us in Christ, verse 9; yea, 2 Cor. i. 20, "All the promises of God are in him Amen," they have all their establishment and ratification in his blood: hence that joyful sound and glad tidings, 2 Cor. v. 19, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and not imputing their trespasses to them; and hath committed to us the word of reconciliation, bearing that he hath made him to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Again, that is the promise of God in Christ, by the Holy Ghost, is plain, not only from his being the third person existing in the Godhead, and proceeding from the Father and the Son, but also from his office in the work of redemption, which is to make the powerful application thereof, as the great Teacher and remembraecer, for bringing home the promise to the hearts of his people appointed unto life; "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name; he shall teach you all things, and

bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you," John xiv. 26. Again, "He shall convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment: He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shew it unto you," John xvi. 8, 14. So much for the subject, the Author of the promise, or whose promise it is.

2ndly, Let us consider a little the matter of the promise, whereof believers are the children; what is the good contained in God's promise. And,

1. God himself is the great matter of the promise, as well as the author of it; as he is the promiser, so he is the thing promised, Ezek. xxxvi. 28, compared with Jer. xxxi. 33, and Heb. viii. 10, "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: I will be your God, and you shall be my people." It is the greatest promise in all the Bible, and contains the most inestimable and invaluable treasure in heaven and earth. O what a great matter is here! God himself giving over himself, and a true property in himself, to every soul that will receive him, and say Amen, by a faith of divine operation: even as the husband gives himself up to his wife in marriage, so does God to the believer; "I will betrothe thee to me for ever, in truth, in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness." Wherever the covenant of grace, the covenant of promise is repeated in scripture, that is always the burden of the song, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." O what excellent matter is here! Eternity diving into this deep, will never reach the bottom of it. Again,

2. Christ himself is the great matter of the promise: as God promises himself, so he promises his Son; Christ is the great promise, the great sum, centre, and substance of the covenant; yea, the all, the sum total of it: "I will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the end of the earth," Isa. xlii. 6, and xlix. 9. It is he that is made of God to us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, 1 Cor. i. 30. He is called "the mercy promised," Luke i. 72. The gospel promises are nothing else but that opening up of the unsearchable riches of Christ, where there is more precious treasure than ever can be told by all the arithmetic of men and angels to eternity. The first promise that ever was made after the fall, was a promise of Christ, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent;" and all the rest of the pro-

mises of the new covenant are streams flowing from that spring. God never designed to save any man by a covenant of works, but he designed to take occasion by man's fall to glorify his grace; therefore, no sooner does sin come, and a curse with it, than grace comes in, and a promise with it; so soon as Adam is arraigned before God for sin, the womb of the promise is open, and it is a promise of Christ, which, in all the after-promises, is made always gradually more and more clear; and ever since God drew up the sluice of the promise, it hath been running to this day; and it is flowing to this day, while the promise of Christ, as the Lord our righteousness and strength, is set before us as the ground of our faith and hope.

3. The SPIRIT himself is also the great matter of the promise, or the good things promised: "I will put my Spirit within you," says God, Ezek. xxxvi. 27. "I will send the comforter," says Christ, John xvi. 7. So that as God promises himself, and promises his Christ, so God and Christ promise the Spirit; the Spirit in his mission and motion is here promised in his influences and operations, graces and fruits; the Spirit of faith, the Spirit of love, the Spirit of repentance, the Spirit of grace and supplication, the Spirit of glory and sanctification, the Spirit of conviction and consolation, the Spirit of light, the Spirit of life, the Spirit of liberty, the Spirit of power and a sound mind; whatever be the hopeless and helpless, the dead, drooping, and desperate-like case that the soul can be in, there is a promise of the Spirit suitable thereto, if I might enlarge. And, indeed, the promise of the Spirit is the first promise that is accomplished in begetting children to God; all the children of promise are made so by the promise of the Spirit taking effect upon them, as a Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, testifying of Christ, and giving the soul Paul's experiences, "He revealed his Son in me." It is not the promised blessing of the Spirit that quickens dead souls and begets children unto God: "The wind blows where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it comes, nor whither it goes; so is every one that is born of the Spirit, John iii. 8. Awake, O north wind; come thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out," Song iv. 16. It is the promised flowing of the Spirit that alone can make happy communion-days. O for that flood promised! "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; even my Spirit upon thy seed, and

my blessing on thine offspring," Isa. xlv. 3. Yea, he is promised, not only as an overflowing flood, but as an overflowing spring: "The water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water, springing up to everlasting life," John iv. 14.

4. All things else, in and with these three, are matter of the promise: "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. viii. 32. And, indeed, where there is a promise of God, a promise of Christ, a promise of the Spirit, there must be a promise of all things: "All things are yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." She that hath the husband, hath all things that are the husband's; and seeing Christ is the heir of all things, his bride cannot but inherit all things, Rev. xxi. 7. I have read of an ancient deed of gift made by one of the first kings of England, giving all that is from heaven to the centre of the earth; so that if there be minerals in the bowels of the earth, they are comprehended in the gift; so God in promising and giving himself, and his Son and his Spirit, does in and with him give all that he hath, and all that he is worth; all the mines in the bowels of God, all the mines in the bowels of Christ, and all the mines of the bowels of the Spirit, are promised; and, O consider with yourself, what unsearchable riches, what unfathomable treasures of grace and glory, are in these mines! and what sweet and blessed fruits grow upon this tree of the new-covenant promise! and what a blessed thing it is to be the children of promise! And here the matter of the promise might be enlarged into innumerable particulars. Why, they are the children of that promise, "A new heart 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." They are the children of that promise, "They shall be all taught of God." They are the children of these promises, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. Children of that promise, "I will be merciful to your unrighteousness, your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more. I will subdue your iniquities; and, Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace. I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. When thou passest through the fire, I will be with thee, that the flames kindle not upon thee; and when thou passest through the waters, I

will be with thee, that the floods do not overflow thee.”—There is a promise of peace with God, they are children of: “This Man shall be the Peace.” There is a promise of pardon, they are the children of: “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thine iniquity, for mine own name’s sake, and will remember thy sins no more.” There is a promise of protection, they are children of: “A man shall be a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the storm; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” There is a promise of provision, they are children of: “Bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be made sure.” There is a promise of healing, they are children of: “I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely.” There is a promise of knowledge and illumination, they are children of: “They shall all know me, from the least to the greatest.” There is a promise of faith, they are the children of: “I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord,” Zeph. iii. 12. There is a promise of love, they are children of: “I will circumcise their heart to love.” There is a promise of repentance, they are children of: “They shall look on him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn.” There is a promise of holiness: “Sanctify them through thy truth, thy Word is truth.” It is true, that it is a part of Christ’s prayer to his Father, John xvii. 17; but his prayer is as good as any promise in all the Bible. There is a promise of perseverance that they are the children of: “I will make an everlasting covenant with thee; I will not depart from thee to do thee good; yea, I will put my fear in thy heart, and thou shalt not depart from me.” In a word, there is the promise of victory over death: “Death shall be swallowed up in victory. Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” There is a promise of everlasting enjoyment of him: “So shall we be ever with the Lord.”—It were endless to tell of all the promises they are the children of; not that all and every one of the promises are in the same manner clearly applied to every believer; but if they be the children of one new-covenant promise, they are the children of all; even as all the curses of the law are linked together like an iron chain, insomuch that when a man is under one curse, he is under all the curses of the Bible; so all the promises of the gospel are linked together like a golden chain, insomuch that he that gets one promise, gets all; though perhaps it is but one link of the chain that he finds his heart fastened to, or one promise that is applied,

yet the application of that infers an interest in all the rest. Thus you see what is the matter of the promise, and surely you may see much matter here for faith to feed and work upon.

3dly, Let us consider the nature and quality of the promise. And,

1. It is a great and precious promise : "Whereby are given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature," 2 Pet. i. 4. And, indeed, the matter of the promise, as already described, declares that it is exceeding great and precious ; and the effect of it, as here described, making the believer a partaker of the divine nature, O how does it discover the greatness and preciousness thereof ! And the relation of the promise to God as the author, to Christ as the purchaser, and to the Spirit as the applier thereof ; the relation of it, I say, to this great God, shews what a great promise it is ; besides that, it is the price of precious blood, and the object of precious faith, and the channel of the communication of great and precious blessings. But of these, perhaps, more afterwards.

2. It is a new promise ; hence so frequently called the New covenant, as Heb. viii. 8. It is a new promise, in opposition to the old promise of life to man's perfect personal obedience in the covenant of works. The old promise was a promise of life, upon condition of perfect obedience of our own ; but there was no promise of grace to do ; but the new promise is a promise upon the perfect obedience of another, and of grace to do also ; not to obtain life and salvation again by our doing, but to glorify the God of our life, by whom we have obtained salvation, 1 Thess. v. 9. The old promise of life stood upon the changeable righteousness of man, and so was forfeited ; the new promise stands upon the unchangeable righteousness of a God-man, and so cannot be forfeited by these that, through grace, take hold of it ; or rather on whom it takes hold. Therefore,

3. It is a sure promise, sure to all the seed : "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed," Rom. iv. 16. Hence it is called, "The sure mercies of David," Isa. lv. 3. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot nor title of God's word, nor of God's promise. See Isa. lv. 18, "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath

mercy on thee." "It is an everlasting covenant, well ordered in all things and sure," 2 Sam. xxxiii. 5. Indeed, the better ordered it is, the more sure and unchangeable it is; and so well is it ordered of infinite wisdom, that there is nothing in it that should be out; and nothing out of it, that should be in; nothing wanting for God's glory and the sinner's welfare. What can be wanting therein, when he who is All in all, is in it? And so well is it ordered, that both the first grace, the last grace, and all grace, is promised therein; beginning grace, advancing grace, and crowning grace, is promised in it; therefore it must be sure. O may faith be set a-work, when we are speaking of these things!

4. It was a dear bought and conditional promise to Christ; to Christ, I say, the Mediator of the covenant, it was a dear-bought and conditional promise; it was upon the condition of his obedience unto death; and here is the great ground and foundation of the promise, next to the sovereign grace and good-will of God to poor miserable sinners; it is Christ coming under the law, to redeem them that were under it, Gal. iv. 4, 5. Hence the covenant of promise is called, the new testament in his blood; his blood is called, the blood of the covenant: this is what makes all sure, that Christ's obedience and satisfaction was the condition of the promise; and the condition is fulfilled by his bringing in everlasting righteousness, and giving his life a ransom for many. All the promises here are dypt in his blood; and the great condition of all the promises of the gospel is, Christ fulfilling, in our room and stead, the condition of the violated covenant of works; that is, perfect obedience to the precept of it, which we had broken; and complete satisfaction to the penalty, threatening, and curse of it, which we had incurred, Though Christ, indeed, hath not believed, repented, and performed the law for us, as a law simply, or a rule of holiness and righteousness, as if these were not duties incumbent upon us, no doubt they are our duty, as well as there are promises of them in the gospel to bring them forth. I know none that can assert any such Antinomian positions, as thus dissolve the obligation of the moral law; yet I assert, that Christ hath even freed us from these, as the proper pleadable condition for justification and eternal life before God; and that his sanctification, righteousness, and merit is the only proper pleadable condition, and ground of all that grace and salvation that lies in the promise, and upon which it is made sure and fast to his people the children of promise: "My covenant shall stand fast

with him," Psal. lxxxix. 23. This is that foundation of faith laid in Zion, as sufficient for all the hearers of the gospel to build their hope and confidence upon for salvation, Isa. xxviii. 16; Rom. ix, 32; 1 Peter ii. 6; 1 Cor. 11, "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Hence, as Christ is promised for a covenant of the people, so the promises are said to be made to him, Gal. iii. 16: and to be all yea and amen in him, 2 Cor. i. 20; and the whole covenant of grace is called a promise of grace in Christ, 2 Tim. i. 1, and thus given to us. Hence, of consequence,

5. It is a free and absolute promise to us, and unconditional; it is freely given: "Whereby are given to us exceeding great and precious promises," 2 Pet. i. 4. All the great things of the promise are freely given, and these are, Christ, and all things with him freely, Rom. viii. 32. Though the use of means is required both of sinners and saints, and though we be under a command and obligation to faith, repentance, and all other duties and graces; yet the covenant of grace is such a free, absolute, and unconditional promise, wherein the Spirit of grace is promised so freely, that no act or deed of ours is the condition thereof. There is a condition of order and connection betwixt one covenant-blessing and another, they being like so many links of a chain closed within each other; and hence many promises are expressed, as it were, in a conditional way, in the dispensation of the gospel; whereupon many mistake this matter, while they distinguish not betwixt the dispensation of the covenant and the tenor of the covenant itself, wherein grace and glory, and all, is promised freely. The covenant of promise cannot be properly conditional to us; otherwise, woe would be to us, whose condition is nothing but sin and misery by nature; this covenant stands upon absolute foundations: such as the electing grace of the Father, the redeeming grace of the Son, and the applying grace of the Holy Ghost. They are all absolutely free and unconditional; there is no spiritual act of ours previous to the application of the covenant of promise. The Spirit coming to work faith, by his creating power, is promised absolutely in the covenant: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power: They shall look to him whom they have pierced;" faith is cast out of the womb of the absolute promise, and begotten by it.—And, indeed, there is not a conditional promise in all the Bible, but what is reductively absolute; because both the thing promised, and the condition of it, is contained in the

womb of the absolute promise. Some worthy divines make faith the condition of the covenant; but their sound explication of what they mean, shews they dare not make it the proper condition. If any that pretend to soundness do so, they but expose their darkness, and discover their mistake concerning the covenant of grace, which is a free promise in Christ Jesus; faith itself, and all the blessings that attend and follow it, being free and absolutely promised. Indeed, conditions on our part, properly so called, would destroy the nature of the gospel, which is a free promise. Where is the freedom of grace, if conditional? It would turn the gospel to the law, and the free covenant of grace to the conditional covenant of works; yea, it would thus destroy the peace of the poor humbled sinner; for when he thinks there is such and such a condition that must be fulfilled by him before he hath a right to meddle with the promise, then he stands a-back, he dares not believe, because he supposes he wants this and that condition and qualification; and so his legal dream hardens his heart against the gospel, and fosters his unbelief, to the dishonour of God, and to his own ruin.—But if he could see the promise free and absolute, “Without money and without price,” and there is no condition in this covenant, but Christ’s obedience unto death, which is performed to God’s satisfaction, then a door is opened to him to plead for all upon this ground, saying, Lord, give me faith, for Christ’s sake; give me repentance, for Christ’s sake; give me grace, for Christ’s sake; who hath performed the condition of all the grace of the new covenant, and through whom all the promises run out freely. He that clogs the gospel-offer with so many terms and conditions, is like a man, as I noticed on a former occasion, offering a cup of wine to a friend, but he makes it scalding hot upon the fire, that his friend dare not touch it with his lip, lest he be burnt. It is the special property of the promise, that it is free, and absolute, and unconditional to us; and if it were not so, none would believe at all; for, if faith itself were a proper condition, then the grand objection is, Oh! but I cannot believe; why, if faith be not absolutely promised, there is no relief in that strait, the gospel could not be a joyful sound to sinners that are humbled to see their want of faith, but only to them that are believers, and have faith already; and so it were needless to preach the gospel to any but believers; but faith, as well as other blessings, being freely promised, unbelievers may put in for a share of this free grace: “Whosoever will, let him come, and take of the

water of life freely." And it is this free offer and promise that uses to create faith ; faith comes by hearing of it. Therefore,

6. It is a powerful and prolific promise ; hence the gospel, which is the promise of Christ, as the Lord our righteousness, is called the power of God to salvation ; because therein is revealed the righteousness of God, from faith to faith, Rom. i. 16, 17. It is the gospel-promise that is the ministration of the Spirit, and so the organ of almighty power and sovereign efficacy for converting souls, and so for saving of sinners. When God comes, he comes in the promise. But here it may be asked, May not the Lord convey himself in a command, as well as a promise ? To which we reply, As the Lord can convey himself graciously to us, in a threatening to the devil, such as that was, Gen. iii. 15 ; yet there was a sweet promise to our first parents wrapt up in it, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent." So the Lord can, and many times does convey himself powerfully into the soul by a command ; such as that, "Look to me and be saved ;" or such as that, "Fear not, for I am with thee ;" but still it is such a command as hath the gospel mixed with it, and a promise wrapt up in the bosom of it, and wherein the Lord undertakes to work what he commands, according to his promise in Christ ; and no command without a relation to the gospel, or the promise, is the channel of saving power ; for there is no salvation to a sinner but in the virtue thereof ; so that still it is the promise that is powerful and efficacious for begetting children unto God, who are therefore called, "The children of promise." But more of this afterwards.—In a word, it is an extensive promise ; and this leads me to the last thing proposed upon this first general head, and that was,

4thly, To consider the object of the promise, or to whom it belongs. And here three things belong to this purpose concerning the promise. 1. For whom it is designed. 2. By whom it is possessed. 3. To whom it is presented.

I. Who are the object of the promise, for whom it is designed ; I mean, for whom it is appointed of God from eternity, so as they shall reap the saving benefit and obtain all the good that is in it ? I answer, "The election shall obtain, though the rest be blinded," Rom. ix. 7 ; Eph. i. 11. And hence all the elect and chosen of God, such of them, I mean, as are subjects capable of actual believing, they, and they only, are brought, by the power of divine grace, to believe the promise to the saving of their souls ; "As many as

were ordained to eternal life believed," Acts xiii. 48; and, "All that the Father hath given me shall come to me," John vi. 37. If any think, O! how can this doctrine of particular election agree with the universal offer of the gospel, and the promise thereof? And how is it evident that God deals fairly with men in this matter, seeing some only are elected and designed of God to the good of the promise? Why, sirs, does not God deal fairly, when he tells us plainly what he is doing, and that he designs to show his mercy towards some, and his justice towards others, Rom. ix. 22, 23: that he designs the revelation of Christ, for the falling and rising of many in Israel; and the gospel for a savour of life to some, and of death to others? If a gardener (as a great divine exemplifies it) watering his garden, where there are many weeds—yea, more weeds than herbs—declares that he waters the whole garden, both weeds and herbs together, that he may make them both to come up above ground, and appear what they are, and, after that, that he may pull out the weeds, and foster the herbs for special use; is not this very right, and fair, and reasonable, insomuch that none needs inquire further, why does he water the weeds? Even so, the church is God's garden, and many reprobate weeds are therein; and when God orders the watering of a gospel dispensation to a mixed multitude of elect and reprobate, declaring that the offer of the gospel is to both, for the conversion of the elect from their natural enmity, and for bringing to light the hatred and enmity of the reprobate against him and the offer of his grace; is it not fair dealing, and a reasonable answer to the cavils of men against the gospel-offer, God by his word makes it manifest that all men, elect and reprobate, are under sin and unbelief, and that no man can come to Christ in the gospel-promise unless the Father draw him? And none would come unless he shewed mercy on some. And this manner of proving men, and shewing them to be what they are, by a common offer of grace unto all, and casting in the net of the gospel-promise among them, is a part of that wonderful prudence whereby Christ makes all these that are outwardly called to be without excuse, and at the same time, fishes out the elect from the sea of sin and misery, when the rest perish: of which prudence speaks God by the prophet, Isa. lii. 13, "Behold, my Servant shall deal prudently, and prosper, and be extolled." O but this wisdom of God, then, in converting the elect, for whom the promise is especially designed, without giving cause of stumbling to the rest, is rather to be admired and praised

than disputed against! Rom. xi. 33, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy; and whom he will he hardeneth. Say not you, why does he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will? Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Rom. ix. 18, 19, 20. If you be disputing for the devil and the reprobate against God's righteous decree, you must be left with all such proud and presumptuous unbelieving despisers of plain doctrine to reckon with your judge, who can well answer for all his decrees and designs; meantime you cannot answer for your presumption. Withal, know that God hath discharged all men to meddle with his secret counsel; "Secret things belong to the Lord our God, but to us the things that are revealed," Deut. xxix. 29. Our great inquiry, therefore, should be not what is God's secret will and promise, but rather who possesses it, and how we may be possessed of it. Therefore,

2. Who are the objects of the promise by whom it is possessed? Why, even all believers; for, "He that believeth hath everlasting life," says Christ, John vi. 47. Believers are in covenant actually, and the promise of the covenant is in their possession, the begun possession of eternal life is commenced with respect to them, and the charter of the promise is delivered to them, and established in their person, they being actually members of the mystical body of Christ; "They, as Isaac was, are children of the promise." Of which more afterwards.

3. Who are the objects of the promise to whom it is presented, that they may take possession, and build their faith and hope thereupon? And here, as the first question related to the object of the promise, with respect to God's eternal destination; and the second, to the object of it with respect to the Spirit's internal saving operation; so this third concerns the object thereof with respect to the gospel eternal dispensation: the first shews us by whom the promise shall be possessed; the second, by whom it is possessed; and the third, by whom it may be possessed. Here, I say, the promise is presented and given in the external gospel dispensation unto sinners, particularly,

(1.) To sinners of mankind: not to fallen angels, but to fallen men; these are the only kind of sinners that God designed to save, and for whose behoof Christ the promised seed was sent, came, died,

and suffered, 1 Tim. i. 15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came to save sinners;" and so the promise is made, and the call to believe the same is given to them; "To you, O men, do I call, and my voice is to the sons of men:" and the minister's commission is, "Go preach the gospel to every creature."

(2.) To sinners in Zion, or the visible church. As the promise of Canaan was made to the whole people of Israel; so the promise of Christ, and all blessings in him, even the everlasting rest above, of which Canaan was a type; that such a promise is given forth to the visible church, see Heb. iv. 1, 2, 3. And hence, whereas these that are without the church are said to be aliens to the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise, Eph. ii. 12; so the members of the visible church are these to whom the promises are said to belong, as it was with the Jewish church, and much more with the Christian New Testament church, where the privileges are not lessened, but enlarged, see Acts ii. 39, "For the promise is to you and to your children; yea, even all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call," namely, external call; for the apostle is there using this as a motive to their faith, who were yet only pricked in their hearts, and not believers with the heart. Compare ver. 37, 38, 41. This was the common privilege of the Jews; "To them belonged the promise," Rom. ix. 4, and so do they belong to us. Here is a foundation of faith laid in Zion, Isa. xxviii. 16, you have all a right of access, and warrant to come and take possession. Yea, I will certify you, in respect of the external gospel-dispensation, there is not a soul here but hath as good a right to the promise as ever any believer had the moment before he believed. Yea,

(3) It is to great sinners that the promise is presented and given forth; "The promise is to you," Acts ii. 39. To whom was the apostle speaking? Even to the crucifiers of Christ; to the murderers of the Lord of glory: and to whom he had said immediately before, "Him you have taken, and by wicked hands crucified and slain," ver. 23. It is presented as a ground of faith to enemies, rebels, fools, mockers, and scorners; Prov. i. 22, 23, "The scorners that delight in scorning, fools that hate knowledge, turn ye at my reproof." And what is the motive? Just a promise, a glorious promise presented to them; "Behold, I will pour out my Spirit upon you; and will make known my words unto you."

(4.) It is given not only to humbled and penitent sinners that see their need, and are convinced of their sin and misery, but even to the unhumbled and impenitent: though none indeed will flee to the promise, or to Christ therein, except they be convinced of their need. And though the promise is given forth to such, preaching good tidings to the meek, for binding up the broken-hearted, Isa. lxi. 1: yet, because these that are humbled are ordinarily the persons that complain, saying, Alas! I am neither humbled nor convinced; therefore I must tell you that the promise is presented and given out, not only to the humbled and legally penitent, but to the most unhumbled, impenitent, unconvinced, and hardened sinner that hears this gospel; even such as see nothing of their need, but think they are well enough without Christ. See Rev. iii. 17, 18, "Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched:" where their very want of conviction and knowledge of their own sad state is made the reason of the gospel-offer by Christ; "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." See also Isaiah lv. 1, 2, where these that are thirsting after vanity are called to look to the free promise of life in Christ; "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." What sort of thirsters they were the challenge in the second verse sheweth, "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." Hence the gospel-promise is given out to these whose hearts are hardened against God, and all that is good: "Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, and far from righteousness; I bring near my righteousness, it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory," Isa. xlvi. 12, 13.

Thus you see the promise is given forth to all sinners in the visible church, in a general indefinite way and manner, in the external dispensation of the word, which names no particular person of any sinner, but speaks to all, without distinction of nation, state or condition, and under such names and characters as are applicable

to all alike, in their natural, lost, dead, and undone circumstances. Thus run all the promises of the new covenant, both in the Old and New Testament, Gen. iii. 15, and xxii. 18, Gal. iii. 8. Jer. xxxvi. 25, 26, and xxxi. 31, 33, 34, compared with Heb. viii. 9, 10, 11, 12, where you see the promises come directed to all nations that shall hear of them, and to all persons indefinitely, and supposes them to be in a cursed, condemned, dead, and wretched state, to whom they are thus directed, presented and offered, and this makes it indeed to be the joyful sound of glad news to all people, Luke ii. 10. But here several questions may be propounded, and a solution of them attempted.

QUEST. 1. You will perhaps say, If the free and absolute promise be thus given forth to all in a gospel-dispensation, then, what need of the use of means?

I answer, 1. In favour of the sovereign grace of God, which is a thing that is neither furthered by our good, nor hindered by our evil, that God will have his elect saved and brought within the covenant, though they were even living in the contempt and neglect of good means: and therefore, I ask, What was Manasses doing, when God apprehended him in the briars and thorns of Babylon? And what was Paul doing, when God first took hold of him by his converting grace; I suppose he was furiously persecuting all that were using any good means; yea, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the church of God, and persecuting the Son of God; yea, no mean will be used rightly by any, till God begin the work, and pour some grace out of the absolute promise, which is indefinitely dispensed, and, therefore, not knowing but this same sovereign grace may take hold of some gospel-despisers, who are yet slighting all the means of grace, this doctrine of grace, absolutely free grace, must be preached, though reprobates should break their neck upon it. Yet,

2. In favour of the holiness of God, who hath appointed the use of means as the ordinary channel wherein his grace runs. I must tell you, that this doctrine carries no prejudice against the use of means, but rather fortifies the same; for the promises are absolute, in opposition to all conditionality on our part, but not in opposition to the diligent use of means: even as the decree of God in election is free and absolute, and yet does not exclude, but include God's executing and accomplishing his decree by such and such means, and ordering our use of them; even so the promise of God is abso-

lute, yet it does not exclude the use of means, no more than the absolute promise that Paul got, that none in the ship should die, did exclude the mean, which was their abiding in the ship, Acts xxvii. 24, 31. And therefore, though the natural use of means, which is all the use that can be made of them by natural men, is not connected with the promise necessarily; yet they that wilfully neglect the means of reading, hearing, praying, and the like, they are so far out of God's way, that they are excluding themselves from the benefits of the promise. If a man wilfully refuse to eat and drink, and use the means of natural life, will he not be accounted a self-murderer, notwithstanding of the absolute decree concerning the number of his days? And so, if a man wilfully refuse the word of life, and obstinately neglect the means of grace, will not God judge him for a self-damner, notwithstanding of the absolute promise given forth, generally and indefinitely, for the encouragement and excitement of faith, in the external dispensation of the gospel?

QUEST. 2. Why, but say you, If the absolute promise be presented to us all, how is it true. if it be not fulfilled in us all?

ANSW. A man may give his word, his promise, his charter to us; and yet, if we will not take his word, nor make use of his charter, we may reap no good of his word, while yet his word is true. Even so here; God, in the external dispensation of the gospel, presents his promise and word of grace to us; but, if we will not take his word, this does not hinder but his word is true, though yet his truth will not be to our advantage, while we will not credit his word, believe his promise, and receive his testimony. There is a great difference betwixt the unbelief of believers, and the incredulity of unbelievers: the unbelief of believers does them much harm; though it shall not make the promise of God of no effect, yet it may breed much wo to them in the meantime; but the incredulity of unbelievers, if they live and die in it, is just the cause of their utter ruin; and yet it makes not the truth of God of no effect; his truth in the promise does not profit us but in a way of believing. It is the best charter and security for heaven and salvation, but as for these that reject this security, and will not take it, it is what will aggravate their damnation; for, "He that believeth not shall be damned:" but they that by a faith of God's operation, embrace the promise, and take it as their only security, they shall find him faithful, to make out every word of promise to them.

QUEST. 3. But, say you, If God hath given a promise to me, will it not be accomplished whether I believe or not?

ANSW. If he give you grace to believe, and so give you it in possession, then it infers an obligation on God to accomplish it, because, to the believer, that receives the promise, it is given definitely and particularly, saying, Thou art the man to whom it is given ; but when it is given only in the gospel-offer, and external dispensation, as it is to all the hearers of the gospel, this infers no obligation upon God to make good the promise to any or every particular man, because it is made only generally and indefinitely, without defining the person in particular, but only pointing at sinners in general ; and it remains only general and indefinite in the offer, till, in a way of believing, you make it your own particular good ; and therefore God is faithful in denying this offered benefit, so long as you, through unbelief, reject it. If you offer a man your bond for a sum of money, and he reject it, then you are under no obligation, by that bond, to give him the contents of it : if he accept the bond, then you oblige yourself ; but if he reject, then you are free, and cannot be accused of unfaithfulness to your promise, or bond. So here, if you truly and believingly take God at his word, then he is bound, by his own promise, to make out all ; for then you, believing, have everlasting life ; but if you will not take God's bond, nor receive his record, but reject it by unbelief, saying, in effect, that it is not good enough security for your salvation and eternal life ; then you, through unbelief, make him a liar, and his word a lie, his promise an untruth ; in which case, if you live and die there, he is so far from being bound to give you the blessing contained in that charter, that he is bound, on the contrary, to execute his threatening upon you ; " He that believeth not, shall be damned." The promise, in the external dispensation, is like a blank bond, or an indefinite obligation to blank persons, that it might be a standing claim to all sinners of mankind to whom it comes, sinners in general are named, no person's name is particularly inserted therein ; but if you, by faith, fill up your name, then the bond gives right to you in particular ; and that which was yours only generally and indefinitely before, becomes yours actually and particularly, upon your receiving it with particular application to yourself.

4. Then, say you, after all that is said, it seems the promise is still conditional, namely, upon believing.

ANSW. Faith and believing is also promised absolutely ; and therefore I ask, What is the condition of that promise of faith and the Spirit of faith ? If this be not free and absolute, where is the

man that can tell me what is the condition upon which one may have faith, and the Spirit of faith to work it? Nay, the promise of it is free and absolute, though yet general and indefinite. And as the promise of faith is free, so justification, sanctification, glory, and all that follows faith, is freely promised: not to it, but on the back of it, in the new-covenant order. So that still the promise is absolute, free, and unconditional to us; the proper condition of them all is fulfilled by, and to be found in the glorious new-covenant Head, Christ Jesus; and upon this condition of his obedience unto death, you ought to plead them; for though they be absolute, in point of proper conditionality in us, yet not exclusively of the use of means. Therefore, O pray, pray: and cry that you may find the power of the promise upon your souls; God allows you to plead for this, Ezek. xxxvi. 37; where, after the enumeration of many absolute promises, the Lord says, "For this will I be inquired of by the house of Israel." O cry and wrestle in prayer, and use the means: only take care that you use not the means as a condition, thinking now you have done your part, and therefore God is obliged to do his, and to grant the promised grace; for thus you turn the free covenant of promise to a conditional covenant of works; and so you turn quite off from the gospel-way of believing, to the old legal way of doing; and consequently you will disappoint yourself, and make Christ of no effect to you, Gal. v. 4, 5, and iii. 29.

QUEST. 5. But, say you, What though I cry and groan for the grace of the promise; yet if the absolute promise be not particular to me, I can never be a partaker of it.

ANSW. In order to clear up this point, and set it in a proper light, let it be considered,

1. That though the promise be absolute, yet it is also indefinite; though dispensed in general, yet it excludes no particular man; so that no man in the world, living under the gospel, can truly say he is not intended in this promise, as well as others; and seeing, therefore, that God hath not excluded thee by name, and that there is no clause that shuts thee out, it is a grievous sin in thee to exclude thyself; these cavilling thoughts and discouragements then do arise from hell; it is the devil and thy own black heart, and not this doctrine that discourages thee. You think, if you had a particular promise bearing your name, you would believe: but, is it not all one, when there is a general promise to sinners, and the chief of sinners, with a command to you to come, and receive, and apply

the promise particularly to yourself, that thus all may be your own?

2. As the general promise lays an argument to your hand, whereby you may plead, saying, Lord, thou that tenders thy grace to me, do thou powerfully apply it; thou who has left me a promise, O let me not come short through unbelief; thou who gives the outward means, O give the inward grace. So, if thou thus groan after the Lord, it would be a sign that the promise, which belongs to all in general, belongs to you in particular; and that by virtue of the promise, something of spiritual life was begun in you; even as a sigh and a groan in a man, is a sign of natural life. If you be acquaint with any inward heart-groaning after the grace of the promise, such as perhaps you cannot put into words, groanings that cannot be uttered, I will tell you for your comfort, it is a sign that the Spirit of grace is already come, Rom. viii. 26: the foundation is laid; Christ will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; he will satisfy the longing soul, and fill the hungry with good things. That hunger and thirst, that groaning and longing, hath a particular promise of being satisfied; "Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled," Matt. v. 6. Let this therefore turn your water into wine presently. Take your food, poor soul, and feast upon it: and let me speak to others, that are not so far forward as you, since I am opening the net of the gospel to all.

O sinner, the promise is held out to you; it is tendered to you, and Christ in it: or, Christ, and the promise in him, is presented to you; for the promise holds out the very remedy for your malady. Are you dead in sins? the promise holds out life to you; "The hour cometh, and now is, that the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and live." O if power would come along with the promise! Are you under wrath? the promise holds out Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come. Are you lost and undone? the promise holds out redemption through his blood, even the remission of sins. Are you unable to save yourself? the promise holds out Christ as the Lord our righteousness and strength; as able to save to the uttermost; and that help is laid upon one that is mighty. Are you unwilling, as well as unable? the promise holds out a power for breaking that enmity and resistance; "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." Have you a devilish heart within you? the promise holds out renewing grace; "A new

heart will I give you." Are you poor, blind, and naked? the promise holds out tried gold, to remedy your poverty; eye-salve to heal your blindness; and white raiment to cover your nakedness. Are you a poor, foolish, guilty, filthy, miserable creature? the promise holds out Christ to you, as made of God, for your behoof, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Tell me a case that the promise does not reach; nay, it is just proposed, O sinner, as a remedy for your malady: and therefore say not, Ah! what shall I do with these promises? or, what have I ado with them? Why, man, woman; "To you is the word of this salvation sent:" and I will acquaint you, in God's great name, what you are to do with it; you are just to take him at his word, saying, AMEN, Lord; even so do, I take thee upon thy promise: O let it take hold of me, for it is good news to me.

What is it to believe the gospel? Why, it is just to hearken to a promising God, and to welcome a promise into the heart. Faith hath relation to the promise, and takes it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, saying, O good news to me; for faith makes particular application of the promise held forth in the general dispensation. Take away the promise out of the Bible, and you take away the gospel; all the commands and threatenings of the law will not make one single sentence of gospel of themselves, and yet infinite wisdom makes a good use of them in a subserviency to the gospel; for, though no precept or threatening be properly any part of the gospel, yet they make preparation for it; they are, like John's rough sermon, to prepare Christ's way: the threatening serves to chase us into God's way, like a flaming sword; and the precept serves to direct us how to keep the way when we are in it. But the gospel itself is God in a promise: it is compared and made up of promises, whereof Christ is the sum total; the Yea and Amen. God, in the gospel, says, Notify to me what is the matter with you, and I will certainly help you; tell me what you would have, and I will undoubtedly give it you; signify to me what you are afraid of, and I will really deliver you. I will tell you, in a word, what the law says, what the gospel says, and what faith says: "By the law is the knowledge of sin;" and accordingly the law says, Man, you have a lawless mind, there is no ordering of it, no order in it; the gospel answers, "I will put my law in thy mind," and bring it to order: and faith says, Welcome the promise; O Lord, I am glad that thou do so; AMEN, "Do as thou hast said," (to us the words of David, 2 Sam. vii. 25). The

law, says Man, woman, your mind is ill, but your heart is worse ; you have a wicked nature, a stubborn and rebellious heart : the gospel answers, " I will take away the heart of stone, and give the heart of flesh : " then faith says, O welcome, Lord, with such a promise ; O ! " Do as thou hast said. " The law says, Man, woman, you have a devil within you, an evil spirit, inclined to every evil : the gospel answers, " I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes : " and then faith says, O welcome, sweet promise ; Lord, I take thee at thy word ; " Do as thou hast said. " The law says, Man, woman, you have committed many grievous sins, and heinous iniquities ; the gospel answers, " Your sins and iniquities will I remember no more ; " and, " I will blot out your sins as a cloud : " and then faith says, O blessed promise ! welcome, welcome ; Lord, I take thee at thy word ; I embrace thy promise ; O ! " Do as thou hast said. " Again, the law says, Man, woman, your backslidings are increased ; you are but a backsliding heifer ; the gospel says, " I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely : " then faith says, O welcome, Lord, with the promise in thy hand ; " Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord ; O ! Do as thou hast said. " Again, the law says, Man, woman, you are but an ignorant mortal ; you know nothing of God as you ought to know ; the convinced soul takes with the charge of the law : and the gospel answers, " You shall be all taught of God ; " and, " Then shall you know ; you shall follow on to know the Lord, " as that word may be read, Hos. vi. 3 : then says faith, " O good is the word of the Lord ! " Welcome a promising God ; Lord, I take thee at thy word ; " Do as thou hast said, " for I will look to thee for the performance of it. Further, the law says, Man, woman, you deserve to be thrust to the bottom of hell, to the darkest and deepest part of the pit of perdition ; and the convinced soul subscribes to the truth of it ; but the gospel answers, " Deliver his soul from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom : " then says faith, O welcome, welcome word of grace ! Lord, I embrace thy promise, and, " I will hope in thy word. " The law says, Man, woman, thy plagues are great, and thy disease incurable ; nay, but the gospel answers, " I am the Lord that healeth thee ; the leaves of the Tree of Life, are for the healing of the nations ; " then says faith, Lord, I will take thee at thy word ; O ! " Do as thou hast said. " Yes, says the Lord, but I will take a day of it, and my own time of accomplishing my promise ; for, " The vision is for an appointed time : "

Then says faith, Lord, I will wait upon thee; "I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me." Well, "The Lord is a God of judgment, and blessed are all they that wait for him."

Thus God is setting about his charter among you; who will sign and set to their name? The promises are flying about your heads and ears; is there none of them flying into your hearts? Have you no use, man, woman, for any of these promises? Woe is me, if God, with a promise in his hand, can get no credit among you? But if you be for the promise, then take it, and God's blessing with it, and Christ in the bosom of it; for, the promise is the place where the Lord lies. Say not, "Who will ascend to heaven to bring down Christ; or descend to the deep to bring him up?" Faith may see him lying in the promise: and if you take the promise in your heart, you take Christ in; and if you thus embrace the promise, then may I say, "As Isaac was, you are the children of the promise." This leads to

II. The Second General Head, which was, To open up the character of their being the children of promise. Now, to open up the nature of this filiation, I would shew, 1. In what respects believers, or the children of God, are the children of promise. 2. In what method and order they come to be actually the children of the promise.

1st, In what respects they are the children of promise; and, I think, they may be called so, in respect of spiritual conception, generation, nutrition, education, assimilation, and amplexation.

1. Believers are the children of promise in respect of spiritual conception: they are conceived in the womb of the promise, before ever they are born again, and long before they were believers; they were conceived by the gracious purpose and sovereign good pleasure of God, in the womb of the covenant that was made betwixt the Father and the Son from eternity, which is the promise in its original constitution; the elect, subjects of this promise, are the seed sown in the womb thereof; the seed promised to the Mediator, of which it is said, Isa. liii. 10, "He shall see his seed;" and Psal. cx. 3, that, "From the womb of the morning he shall have the dew of his youth." All that come to be actually, in time, the children of the promise, were virtually so, from all eternity; "According as he hath chosen us in Christ, before the foundation of the world," Eph. i. 4. "According to the promise of life, which is in Christ