

Five Sacramental Sermons

Sermon 4

A Sermon After the Communion. — The Believer's Dignity in Being an Heir of God.

[John Willison](#)

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

Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son: and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. — Gal. iv. 7.

IN this chapter the apostle holds forth the happy state of believing Gentiles under New Testament times; that it is ever preferable to that of the believing Jews under the Old Testament. The Jewish church he compares to a child in minority, that is, under tutors and governors, and is acquainted only with the first rudiments of religion; and likewise to the state of a servant, that is still kept under subjection and bondage: for that church was always in a servile condition, having been under the heavy yoke of a great many ceremonial rites and observances. But our blessed Lord Jesus, by his coming into the world, hath broken off that yoke from his people's necks, and hath brought them under a more spiritual and agreeable dispensation; yea, he hath sent forth his Spirit into their hearts. Upon which account the apostle concludes them to be happy, yea, even children of God, "Wherefore thou art no more a servant," &c.

In the text we have the happy state of the believing Galatians briefly represented. I. Negatively, "Thou art no more a servant;" i. e. no more in a state of servile subjection to the law, and to the Mosaic rites and observations. II. Positively, "Thou art a son;" i. e. thou hast attained to a more excellent state of liberty, like to that of sons who have come to ripe age. He means not that believers under the Old Testament had not that privilege of being children of God; no, believers then were really sons, but kept in such a state, and trained up under such hard discipline, that they seemed more like servants than sons. But, saith he, to you, the believers under the New Testament, the discipline

is changed, and you have attained to more honourable son-like treatment. III. We have an inference from this privilege of son-ship, "And if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." Among men only, the eldest son is heir, but all God's children are heirs.

In which we have two things: 1. The high dignity and preferment of God's children; they are heirs of God, i.e. they have a free right and title to eternal life, and all the gifts and blessings of God; yea, to the infinite God himself, who is the believer's chief good and portion. 2. The way of obtaining this dignity and happiness, through Christ, and the merit of his blood: He is God's eternal Son, and heir of all things, and being our surety, he, by his obedience and sufferings, hath purchased a title to believers, to be God's sons by adoption, and joint heirs with him of the heavenly inheritance: "He is our elder brother, and is not ashamed to call us brethren." The inheritance is his by nature, but ours by grace.

From the words thus explained, observe,

1st. That the privileges of believers under the New Testament, exceed those who lived under the Old. The legal state was more servile, but the gospel state is more filial.

2d. That though God hath one Son only by eternal generation, viz., our Lord Jesus Christ; yet he hath many sons by grace and adoption, viz..

3rd. That those who have the Spirit of God dwelling in their hearts, and exciting them to prayer, have a good evidence of their son-ship, and filial relation to God. This is clear from the connection of this verse with the preceding.

4th. The doctrine that I am to insist on at this time is, "That it is the great honour and privilege of all true believers, to be the children and heirs of God through Jesus Christ?"

This is confirmed from that parallel text, Rom. viii. 16, 17.

The method for handling this subject shall I. To enquire in what sense believers are the children of God. II. In what respect they are called heirs. III. What is the heritage they are entitled to. IV. How it is they attain to this privilege. V. To show the wonderful free grace of God, in granting such a glorious privilege to believers, as to be his children and heirs. VI. Make improvement of the whole.

I. As to the first, In what sense believers are the children of God.

1. Negatively, It is not to be meant here, that that they are his children only, (1.) In respect of creation, for so all men are God's children, Mal. ii.10, "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" Had believers no further interest in God than this, they should have but little comfort; for in this sense God is also Father to the devils and wicked men, for "he made them; but he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will allow them no favour." Nor, (2.) Is it to be meant, that they are his children only by providence; for so he is to all, Deut. xxxii. 6, "Is he not

thy Father that bought thee?" i.e. hath redeemed thee from slavery, and conferred great blessings on thee. Nor, (3.) Is it to be understood of their being his children by profession, or external covenant-engagements; for so all the members of the visible church are, Isa. i. 2.

2. Positively, Believers are the children of God, by way of special grace, and that in these several respects, (1.) In respect of election, God has chosen and predestinated them from eternity to be his children and heirs, upon whom he will entail the kingdom of heaven, Eph. i. 5. (2.) In respect of regeneration, he dignifies them with a new birth, working a gracious change upon them, infusing in them a supernatural principle of holiness, whereby they become like their heavenly Father, and so they are said to be "begotten and born of God," Jam. i. 18 ; I John iii. 9. (3.) They are his children by adoption; which is an act of God's free grace, whereby he assumes those into the number of his children who were not so naturally, yet were strangers and aliens: Yea, he takes those who were enemies, and of the family of hell, into the family of heaven; and graciously entitles them to all the advantages, dignities, and privileges of children. — As, for instance, he educates, brings them up, and makes provision for them, as for sons, Isa. xlvi. 8; Matt. vi. 32; PsaL lxxxiv. 11. He allows them a share in his fatherly love and compassion, together with the protection and attendance of sons, Jer. xxxi. 20; Heb. i. 14. — He frees them from a servile state, or any base and drudgery work, and endues them with a free spirit, Rom. viii. 15. -They have the chastisement of sons, which is most needful, Deut. viii. 5; Heb. xii. 6-8. — He allows them free access to, and a filial confidence with him in prayer; hence, in the verse preceding my text, the apostle saith, "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." And, lastly, he entitles them to the inheritance of sons, as in the text, "If sons, then heirs of God." And this leads to,

II. The second head, viz. In what respect believers are called heirs. And for the better illustration hereof, I shall show wherein temporal and spiritual heirs do agree, and wherein they differ.

They agree and resemble one another, in these things:

1. He that is an heir of an estate, hath his title freely conveyed to him; he pays not for it, because he has it by birth. So believers, who are spiritual heirs, have the title to their inheritance freely; and as they have not nothing to pay for it, so it is given to them "without money, and without price." And though they have not a title to it by their natural birth, yet by their new birth they become the sons of God, and heirs of heaven.

2. They who are rightful heirs of an estate have the surest title of any other, because it is built upon nature: a father may frown upon his son and heir for his fault, but doth not easily disinherit him; nor will he turn him out of doors, as he doth a servant, for his offence. So believers, who are God's adopted children and heirs, have a most sure title to the heavenly inheritance. Though God may chastise them, yet he will not disinherit them, PsaL lxxxix. 32-34, "I will visit their transgressions with the rod; nevertheless, my loving-kindness I will not take utterly from him. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the

thing that is gone out of my lips.” Our title to the inheritance by the second covenant, is far surer than Adam's was by the first: for when he offended, God treated him as a servant, and turned him out of doors: but the believer, who is become a child and heir by Jesus Christ, is better secured by the second covenant; for he hath not only God's word, God's writ, and God's oath, to confirm it, but he hath the Mediator's blood sealing his charter, and an earnest of the inheritance already given him, viz. God's Spirit put into his heart, 2 Cor. i. 22. So that his right and title is indefeasible and can never be altered.

3. An heir's title to an inheritance is reckoned more honourable than his who obtains it another way. So the believers' title is most honourable, being made heirs of God, and co-heirs with his own Son Jesus Christ, Rom. viii. 17.— Christ is the natural Son, and has the primary right to the inheritance; but believers, by adoption, are assigned to a share, and made co-heirs with him. So that Christ and believers do, as it were, divide heaven betwixt them; they have the same Father, dwell in the same house, sit at the same table, reign on the same throne, partake of the same glory. O! what honour is this, which is put on worms of the earth! John xvii. 22, 24; John xx. 17; Rev. iii. 21. -Christ indeed being our elder Brother, his inheritance is double, and his power and glory is far greater than the glorified saints and angels, “insomuch as he hath, by inheritance, obtained a more excellent name than they,” Heb. i. 4; Eph. i. 22.

4. An heir, during his minority, hath not the actual possession of his inheritance, as being incapable to manage it, and therefore hath tutors and curators appointed him; so a believer, though an heir of heaven, hath not the possession of the inheritance, while here. This life is the time of his minority, and Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are his tutors and curators, until he arrive at ripe age, and the years of his majority, when he will be fully “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light,” and then he enters upon the immediate possession of all that is promised to him.

5. An heir of an estate, though he want the possession for a time, yet he hath a present maintenance allowed him out of it, suitable to his station and circumstances; so believers, during their minority in this world, have a sufficient maintenance granted them, out of that great inheritance promised to, and provided for them. As for temporal things, they have a competency secured to them while here: “Their bread shall be given them, and their water shall be sure.” And for spiritual things, they shall have as much grace, strength, comfort, and joy, as will bear their charges, until the time appointed come, when they shall enter upon the full possession of all.

6. An heir of a good estate may be somewhat straitened in his in his circumstances for a time, being of burdens on the estate, or some necessary restrictions laid upon him; yet comforts himself with the hopes of a plentiful estate at length: so the heirs of promise may be under many straits and difficulties while here, under burdens of corruptions, fears of wrath, and hidings of God's face. They often complain of little grace, weak faith, languishing desires, and of faint discoveries of God and Christ, and the invisible things of the other world: yet nevertheless they should not murmur, but encourage themselves in the faithful promise and sure right they have obtained in Christ; and be thankful; if as much be allowed them out of the inheritance, as will bear their charges to heaven,

where they shall be supplied to the full, forget all their straits, and remember their poverty no more.

7. An heir, whatever his present straits and circumstances be, is a respectful and honourable person; and they who know who he is born to, and what his expectations are, put respect upon him: so believers, however mean and straitened they be, during their minority in this world, are very honourable persons, “the excellent ones in the earth,” and, in many respects, “more excellent than their neighbours;” they are heirs of a great inheritance, and, upon this account, should be honoured by those among whom they live; for though they make no great outward appearance at present, yet, in a little, they shall be crowned with glory and honour.

On the other hand, temporal and spiritual heirs differ in these things:

1. Temporal heirs, however rich they be, are only heirs of a corruptible spot of earth; but believers are heirs of an “inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them.” And what is earth to heaven?

2. Many heirs, here on earth, never come to the actual possession of their estates; for they may be squandered away, or lost by the ill-management of their parents or tutors; or they may be taken from them by oppression or violence; and oftentimes death comes and snatches away the young heirs before they attain to ripe age; so that they never win to the possession. But heaven's heirs will all certainly get possession of their inheritance; their tutors will not lose nor mismanage it to them; no enemy can seize it by violence; nor “thief break through and steal.” And death will be so far from depriving them of the possession of their inheritance, that it brings them to the immediate and full fruition thereof; through a glorious eternity.

3. A temporal heir doth not fully possess the heritage till the father dies; but the spiritual heir doth possess it fully in his father's life-time. Our eternal Father lives for ever; and this doth not hinder the heirs possessing: what a mystery is here! In temporal heritage the father dies to give place to the son; but here the Son dies to bring the heirs of heaven to live and possess with the Father.

4. When a temporal heir comes to the possession, he can enjoy the inheritance but a short while; for death soon comes and dispossesses him. But the spiritual heir, when he gets possession of his inheritance, becomes immortal, and is for ever out of the reach of death.

III. The third head in the method was, to show what the heritage is which God's children and heirs are entitled to; surely it is the greatest and largest that ever was: “All things are yours,” 1 Cor. iii. 21. More particularly,

1. The earth is their inheritance, Mat. v.5, though commonly they possess little of it, yet they have a covenant-right to make use of the good creatures, and the outward support and refreshments of life. The men of this world, though they have a general providential

right to such things of the earth as they possess, yet they have no covenant-title thereto, as believers have: their enjoyments come not to them from God as a loving Father, or as a God in covenant with them, to promote their souls' good: they have not the comfortable and sanctified enjoyment of the creature; no, this comes only to us in Christ, and is a part of the believer's portion. By the fall, Adam and his posterity were disinherited, they lost their covenant-right over the creatures, with the sanctified use thereof. But in Christ, who is the heir of all things, the title is renewed to believers, and they become heirs of the world: and whatever part of it falls to their share, they may look on it as a blessing of the covenant a legacy from Christ, a part of his purchase, sanctified for their use, and designed for their good

2. Heaven is their heritage, however poor they be in this world, yet they are heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him, Sam. ii. 5. The heirs of this celestial crown are like princes in disguise, travelling in a foreign country: strangers, that know them not look only to their outward appearance; and are apt to think them poor and miserable; but their hopes and happiness lie in things not seen—they are heirs of the land that is afar off. Sometimes, with Moses, they are allowed to come to the top of Pisgah, to view this promised land, and this is most satisfying: at other times, with Abraham, they are admitted, as it were, to walk through it and hear God say, “All this is thine, all is made over to thee in Christ:” and this fills the heirs of heaven with joy “unspeakable, and full of glory.”

3. In the text they are called “heirs of God;” God himself is their inheritance, as this is more than to say, they are heirs of both heaven and earth. “I will be your God,” is the most comprehensive promise in the whole Bible, it imports an interest in all the blessings and promises of the new-covenant, in all the purchase and fulness of Christ in all the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, and in all the divine attributes and perfections. When the Lord saith to the heirs of salvation, “I will be your God;” how great is the inheritance he bequeaths to them! It is more than if he made over to them a thousand heavens, or ten thousand worlds; for, saith he, I give you the omnipotent Jehovah, I make over myself unto you, in all my essential perfections; my omnipotence shall be your guard, my omniscience your overseer, my omnipresence your companion, my bounty your store, my wisdom your counsellor, my justice your rewarder, my holiness your fountain of grace, my unchangeableness the rock of your security, my all-sufficiency your inheritance, and my eternity the date of your happiness. Surely, O believer, the “lines are fallen to you in pleasant places,” and you have but a goodly heritage.

IV. The fourth head was, to inquire how believers attain to this high privilege, of being children. and heirs of God. — 1. It is not from any worth or merit in them, but from the free love and goodness of God, that hath predestinated them to the adoption of children, and chosen them heirs of the kingdom. 2. It is by the mediation of Jesus Christ, who, as their Surety, interposes for them, when under sentence of death; purchased the inheritance for them by his merits, and left it to them in legacy by his testament, which he sealed and confirmed with his own blood. 3. By the application of the Holy Ghost, who is the executor of Christ's testament, and who comes and infests

believers in the bequeathed inheritance, by renewing their souls, working faith in them, and disposing them to close with the Redeemer; planting all gracious habits in them, and thereby giving them the earnest and first fruits of the inheritance.

V. The fifth thing was to show the wonderful grace of God in granting such a glorious privilege to poor believers. If we seriously consider the grace of God in adopting us to be his children and heirs, we may well cry out with the apostle, 1 John iii. 1, "Behold! what manner of love is this the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God?" The wonderfulness of this grace appears in these things:

1. That he adopts us to be his sons and heirs when he needed us not. Men adopt sons because they are childless, and need some to propagate their families, keep up their name, and perpetuate their memories. But the eternal Father adopts children and heirs, though he hath a natural and eternal Son of his own, who is the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person, a Son in whom his soul delighteth; and although he could have been infinitely happy without us, and needed no accession to his glory. We stood in need of a Father, but he stood not in need of sons.

2. That he chooses those to be his sons and heirs who have nothing to recommend them to him, but are utterly unworthy of this dignity and privilege. Men usually adopt those of their kindred, or who are their friends and favourites; but God shows this favour to rebels, enemies, traitors, Satan's slaves, and hell's heirs. Men adopt those in whom they see, or at least fancy, something of worth. Mordecai adopted Esther because she was fair: but God adopts those who are naturally most vile and unworthy, yea, despicable as worms, loathed as carcasses, deformed as monsters, black as Ethiopians, and diseased as lepers. Having nothing to engage his love, but every thing to provoke his loathing of us.

3. That he should be at such charge and cost in adopting us. Men are at no pains about it, but to draw up a writ, and sign or seal it and then all is done; but infinite wisdom and power must be set on work to make us sons and heirs; an eternity must be spent in contriving the method; the eternal Son of God must die to bring it about, and the charter of our adoption must be sealed with his most precious blood. Never was it heard that any man let his only son suffer and die to adopt an enemy; but this the great God hath done, which is the wonder of the redeemed, the wonder of angels, and will be the wonder of eternity.

4. That he exalts those whom he adopts to such high dignity and honour; for God to have pardoned his enemies, and delivered them from going to hell, had been much; for him to have taken his enemies, and made them his friends and favourites, had been more: but for God to take his mortal enemies into his bosom, and make them his sons and heirs; yea, beautify them with his image, value them as his jewels, entitle them to his kingdom, and make them co-heirs with his own beloved Son, is such a prodigy of love as surpasseth all infinite comprehension. To have advanced one of the blessed cherubim or seraphim so high, had been a stupendous act of grace: but to take a lump of polluted dust, a cursed sinner, a wretch as black as hell could make him, and raise

him so high, yea, above the brightest cherub in glory, is eternally an astonishing wonder of free love.

APPLICATION.

I. Use of *information*. This doctrine informs us of these things:

1. Of the wonderful love and goodness Of God to poor elect sinners in Christ: he takes enemies into his family, yea, puts them among his children; and not only doth he confer the honour of sonship on them, but also puts the nature of sons in them; for they are sons by regeneration, as well as by adoption; both these are joined together, as is clear from John i. 12, 18, "To them that believe he gave power to become the sons of God, who were born not of the will of man, but of God."

2. That believers are of more noble and illustrious descent than any others; they are sons of the most high God. Some talk of their progenitors, and value themselves on their high extract: so the Jews vaunted that they were Abraham's seed, John viii. 33. But surely it is an infinitely greater privilege to be among the sons of God. David thought it no small honour to be son-in-law to the king of Israel, 1 Sam. xviii. 18. And shall any among us reckon it a small thing to be a son to the King of heaven.

3. That God is an infinitely rich and bountiful Father, who makes all his children heirs, and that of a great and splendid inheritance: though his family be numerous, yet there is not one of them left unprovided; for he brings "many sons to glory," Heb. ii. 10.

II. Use of *examination*. Let us all try what right or claims we have to this honour and privilege, of being the sons and heirs of God.

1. Try, O communicants, if ye have the marks and characters of God's children. (1.) Have you cordially made choice of God as your Father in Christ, and dedicated yourselves to him at this time in a perpetual covenant, Jer. iii. 19, "How shall I put thee among the children! &c. Thou shalt call me my Father." (2.) Have ye received the Mediator by a true and lively faith; for it is hereby we become children, John i. 2, "To as many as received him, he gave power to become the sons of God." Gal. iii. 26, "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." We can be adopted only by virtue of his right, who is the elder brother, and heir of all things. (3.) Are you like your Father? have you his image upon you, holiness? (4.) Do you sincerely love Christ, your elder Brother and Redeemer? John viii. 42, "Jesus said unto them, if God were your Father, ye would love me." (5.) Do ye love and esteem all the children of the family as the excellent of the earth? Psal. xvi. 2. (6.) Are ye heartily concerned for the interest and welfare of your mother, the church? Psal. cxxxvii. 6. (7.) Are ye troubled for offending your Father? 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27. (8.) Are you desirous of your Father's presence and company? Psal. xxvi. 8. (9.) Have ye children's appetites for your spiritual food? Psal. lxxxiv. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 2. Try if you have the spirit and disposition of heirs.

(1.) Is it your main care to make sure your birth-right and title to the inheritance? Many of God's children have not the assurance hereof but they all labour after it, and are restless without it, Matt. vi. 33.

(2.) If you be heirs, you will highly value your birth-right, and not be willing to part with it for a trifle; you will not (like profane Esau, Heb. xi. 16) sell it for sensual pleasures and gratifications of the flesh. Nay, your hearts will rise against Satan's solicitations to break with your Father, and sell your birth-right, and say with Naboth to Ahab, 1 Kings xxi. 8, "The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." God forbid that I should part with my portion in Christ for worldly gain, carnal satisfactions, or any earthly delight whatsoever.

(3.) Your hearts and thoughts will be much set upon your heritage above, for it is your treasure, and "where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also," Matt. vi. 21. What do ye think most of when ye are alone? Nebuchadnezzar, when he was alone, thought on his large territories, Dan. iv. 29, 80, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom," &c. So, if you be heirs of heaven your hearts will be running much thither.

(4.) In the time of your difficulties and straits, you will be drawing your comfort and encouragement from the large and goodly heritage you are entitled to; and likewise you will be looking and waiting when it will fall into your hands yea, you will be sending messengers and spies to the land of promise to survey it, and bring you good tidings from thence for your support while in the wilderness. You will be feasting and entertaining yourselves with the thoughts of your rich inheritance and portion in Christ, and groaning within yourselves, "When shall I be with my Father and elder Brother above? When shall my pilgrimage be finished, and the time of my minority expire, that I may enter upon the possession." Rom. viii. 23, "We, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies."

(5.) All those who are heirs of heaven get the seal and earnest of the inheritance put in their hearts, viz. the Spirit of God, 2 Cor. i. 22; Eph. i. 18, 14, "After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession." As an earnest-penny secures our right to a bargain, and is also a part of it; so the sanctifying Spirit, of grace of God in the heart, is a pledge and earnest of the glorious inheritance above. O communicants! have ye got this earnest in your souls? Are ye beginning to reap the first-fruits of the inheritance? Surely it will be matter of rejoicing to find it.

QUEST. *How shall I know if I have got the Spirit in my heart, as the seal and first-fruit of the inheritance?*

ANS. By his actings and operations in your souls. 1. Wherever he is, he is an illuminating Spirit that lets you see the evil of sin, and the excellency of Christ. 2. A humbling Spirit that brings the soul to lie in the dust, and abhor itself for its

abominations. 3. A Spirit of prayer that inclines the soul to come to its Father for the supply of wants, Gal. iv. 6. 4. A sin-subduing Spirit that helps to weaken and mortify indwelling corruption, Rom. viii. 13. 5. A soul-sanctifying Spirit that infuses, increases, quickens, and actuates grace in the heart, Eph. iv. 23, 24. Now wherever these gracious actings and operations of the Spirit are to be found, you may conclude you have got a seal of your heirship, the earnest and first-fruits of the inheritance, as a pledge of your being shortly put in possession of all.

III. Use of *exhortation* to two sorts, 1. Those who are aliens and foreigners. 2. Those who are children and heirs of God.

I. I shall speak to those who are aliens, have no interest in God's family, nor the children's privileges; and yet many such have been presuming to eat of the children's bread, to which they have no right. I entreat you to awake from your security, and consider the misery of your state. O! that God would sound an alarm in your ears.

1. If you be not God's children, you are dogs; and yet you have been presuming to meddle with the children's bread, which is horrid sacrilege.

2. You are children of the devil, and of the family of hell; nay, you are Satan's bond slaves. There is no medium; either you are God's children, or the devil's slaves, John viii. 44. And what have Satan's slaves to do with God's holy things?

3. O alien and foreigner! thou art a child of wrath, an heir of hell; this is thy native heritage and portion, and this sad heritage will remain sure to thee; when thou leavest thy substance to others, this shall go alongst with thyself to another world. "The wrath of God abideth on thee," both here and eternally: O sinner! wrath is thy constant covering now, and the heavens are growing blacker and blacker every day above thy head. The earth is weary of thee; the pit is opening her mouth for thee; "Hell is groaning for thee from beneath;" and the thread of life, that is keeping thee out of it, is just ready to break. O! waken before it be too late.

4. Thou art "without God in the world;" thou hast no interest in God as thy friend; thou art far from God; he is thy wrathful enemy: thy hell is begun already; for what makes hell but exclusion from the presence of God!"— Depart from me, ye cursed." Now you are gone from God already, with his curse upon you, like the damned; only your case is not desperate as theirs is: there is some hope of your returning to God again: but there is none of theirs. " O! turn then to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope."

5. By presuming on the Lord's table, you have drawn a new curse on yourselves; for ye have been mocking God, shedding Christ's blood, murdering the blessed Redeemer. You have been acting Judas's part, saying, "Hail, Master," and "betraying the Son of God with a kiss." O! Satan's slaves, you have been eating Christ's bread, but God's curse was on the morsel you got; and you have drawn down new soul-plagues on yourselves. You will be ten times more Satan's slaves than you were before; for to all your other sins you have added this, of "crucifying Christ afresh."

QUEST. *Is there any hope for such children of wrath, and heirs of hell, as we are? “What shall we do to be saved?”*

ANS. 1. I say to you, as Peter to Simon Magus, Acts viii. 21, 22, “Thou hast neither lot nor part in this matter; thy heart is not right with God: repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God for forgiveness.” Repent and weep over a slain Christ, whom you pierced at his table, and cry, “Lord, deliver me from blood-guiltiness.” O! can you weep over a dead child, or friend? Can you weep for the loss of world's wealth, and not weep for the loss of your souls, and of your Saviour?

2. Retire into some secret place, and there meditate on your misery, while children of Satan, and heirs of wrath. Firmly believe your sad state, your salvation is impossible, while in it. There is a bill of exclusion passed in the court of heaven, against all under a covenant of works, which is your case, Gal. iv. 30, “The son of the bond-woman shall not be heir:” heirs of wrath must not be heirs of glory: there is no salvation under this covenant, but on a condition impossible, perfect obedience to the law, and satisfaction to divine justice for the wrong already done. There is no promise in it of pardon, no place for repentance, no accepting the will for the deed. O! poor forlorn soul, put the question to thyself; How shall I live in this case? How shall I die in it? How shall I appear before a just God in it? Surely, a state of wrath is too hot a climate for my soul to live in.

Cherish convictions when God sends them: go not to run away with God's arrows of conviction sticking in your consciences, to your employments, to work them out; to your cups, to drink them out; to your bed, to sleep them out; to your companions, to sport them away. No, but run with them to the great physician, Christ, that he may take them out with his own hand, and apply Gilead's balm to the wound. Alas! many destroy their immortal souls, by crucifying their convictions.

4. Presently embrace the sweet gospel-offers that are made to you; now is the day when the great trumpet is blown, that out-cast perishing sinners may come and accept of the gospel jubilee, Isa. xxvii. 13. Now liberty is proclaimed to the captives: now the heirs of wrath may become heirs of glory. And what way is that? even by closing with Christ in a marriage-covenant. Come marry the heir of all things, and you shall be freed from bondage, and heaven shall be your dowry. Come flee presently out of the dominion of the law, into the dominion of grace; and there the law's curses shall not reach you. Accept of Jesus Christ on the terms of grace, and you shall have a great heritage with him, an inheritance that shall last for ever. Worldly heritages do not last; all your riches and honours, profits and pleasures, must shortly be buried with you, they cannot accompany you into another world. But if you accept of Christ, as your Saviour and Surety, then the eternal God is your God “and portion for ever.” O heirs of wrath, what are your hearts saying? Are you content with this bargain? Are you willing to leave Satan's slavery, and become children and heirs of the great King?

5. Remember that dreadful vengeance will shortly seize upon them that refuse such a glorious heritage: consider what is abiding you, Psal. xi. 6, “Snares, fire, brimstone, and an horrible tempest, shall be the portion of your cup.”

Exhortation II. To those who are sons and heirs of God. I shall speak, in the first place, some things to you all in general.

1. Has God of his free mercy and rich grace, made you his sons and heirs, then be humbled, and remember what you once were. When God found you, you were “children of wrath, even as others.” Free love hath picked you out from among the multitude of condemned malefactors, hath commanded your fetters to be taken off, put a pardon in your hands, and brought you forth to the glorious liberty of the children of God, and made you “heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.” You had nothing in you to engage him to love you, yet he loved you, when you were most loathsome. What matter of wonder is here! The glorious Bridegroom courted and espoused you to himself on the day in which you might have been led forth to execution! He took off your prison-garment, and clothed you with robes of righteousness, and garments of salvation. He took the chains from off your arms, the rope from about your neck, and put his own comeliness on you, that you might be fit for the King's table! be not proud of your gifts, graces, or attainments: but remember, that ye were once “children of wrath, even as others;” all you have is borrowed. Be humble also, and “remember your faults this day.” Mind, how you have forgotten your benefactor! How unkindly you have treated him that remembered you in your low estate! How unsuitably you have walked! “Is this your kindness to your friend?”

2. Pity the children of wrath, and heirs of hell, that at still lie in chains of darkness. Be not unconcerned for them, seeing ye were once in the same condition with them; ye have got ashore, but your fellows behind you are still in danger of perishing. Put on bowels of compassion for them, pity them, and use all means for their deliverance.

3. Be content with your lot in a present world, and be easy under your present straits and difficulties, whatever they be; for you have the prospect of a great inheritance from whence you may take encouragements under every trial. You may be easy under the world's hatred, and carry cheerfully amidst all affronts and injuries, for you may expect to be envied. Favourites of princes are commonly slandered and abused. Joseph was hated of his brethren, because his father showed more than ordinary kindness to him. “If ye were of the world, saith Christ, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you,” John xvi. 19. But let this solace your minds; you are heirs of God, and dearly beloved of him.

4. Live as children of God, and heirs of the kingdom; walk worthy of your dignity, and behave suitably to your character. You have the angels, those great officers of the crown, and chief ministers of state, appointed to wait on you constantly, while here below, and you have a glorious expectation hereafter. Show forth then the greatness and nobleness of your spirits, by undervaluing mean and sordid things. Let your speech and actions here look like the country to which you are going, that it may be said of you, as of Gideon's children, Judg. viii. 18, “Each one resembled the children of a king.” The heirs of earthly kings have been observed to have had generous and noble spirits, and have scorned to intermeddle with base and inferior matters. It is a common story of

Alexander the Great, that when he was a little boy, and provoked to run a race with one of his inferiors, he first demurred, and then flatly refused the challenge, saying, "It did not become the son of a king to submit to so mean an undertaking, and contend with one so far below him." The brave spirit of that princely youth may shame those Christians who are the adopted sons of God, and heirs to a crown that shall never fade; and yet oftentimes are found grovelling on the earth, like the men of this world, and busied about things very far below them. Let the heirs of heaven maintain a holy contempt of the world, and the things thereof. Let them set their feet on those things on which worldlings set their hearts; and reckon themselves richer and happier in their relation to God and the kingdom above, than any graceless monarch that ever wore an earthly crown. Shall earthly men make such a noise in the world, and think none comparable to them, because forsooth their heap of dung is some what bigger than their neighbours? (for so Paul esteems the world) and will the children of the King of heaven, "of whom the world is not worthy," Heb. xi. 38, be so low and mean-spirited, as to be amused and dazzled with the world's vanities; who yet have God for their portion, Christ for their husband, heaven for their home, and glory for their treasure?

5. Let the heirs of heaven be mutually concerned in one another; let them sympathise together, when any of them is in trouble, and also rejoice in one another's welfare. And when the time cometh that they arrive at full age, and are taken up to the possession of their inheritance, though they be your near relations, do not quarrel God's providence, or mourn, "as those that have no hope;" or carry, as if you grudged their happiness; but cheerfully submit to your Father's will, and rejoice in their preferment; for the day of their death is better than the day of their birth."

6. Be earnest in prayer, that God may raise up many young heirs to supply the room of those that he is taking home. Let the heirs of God be never so much increased, God's children will not envy their number, but greatly rejoice therein; seeing the inheritance is vast, and infinitely satisfying to both men and angels: and our heavenly Father is highly glorified in the multitude of his children. And, Lastly, When heirs are brought into the family, carry affectionately to them; be kind to young heirs, especially during the time of their nonage and want of experience; be for "eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame," and great shall be your reward in heaven.

In the next place, I shall say something more particularly to those who were at their Father's table yesterday, of whom I presume there have been, and are several sorts.

I. There may be some, I hope, that have ground to say, that they came to their Father's table, and he smiled on them, and dealt bountifully with them. To such I shall say these few things: 1. Wonder at the Lord's kindness, and bless his name with your whole souls, for his distinguishing favours to you, who were by nature enemies of God, and children of Satan. 2. Hold fast and improve carefully what you have got, and let not Satan rob you of it. 3. Sympathize with other children of the family, that have not got your length, but perhaps are under great discouragements; mind their case, and speak a good word for them now, while you are favourites of heaven.

II. In the next place, I shall speak to those heirs of heaven, who, notwithstanding of their being at the table, remain full of doubts and fears, and are very apprehensive that God has not yet put them among the children, nor given them a right to the heir's portion. Well, what is the ground of your doubting? 1. O, saith one, I scarce feel the working of the sanctifying Spirit of God in my soul, which is the common earnest or pledge of the inheritance, that God useth to give to his heirs while here. Ans. Though grace be weak in you, you must "not despise the day of small things," or say you have none at all: nay, bless God, if thou canst spy any spark of grace in thy heart at all, and pray that God may cherish it. A man that gets an earnest of a good bargain, is not much discouraged whether it be a greater or a smaller piece of money, a sixpence or half-a-crown. for he thinks the least piece is a sufficient earnest or pledge from an honest man of his bargain; and he is easy, seeing he knows he has to do with one that is faithful, and will not go back of his word: indeed he might be discouraged, if that which he got were not an earnest-penny: but there is a great difference betwixt a piece of money that is given in gratitude, and that which is given only in earnest, as a pledge of a far greater sum, or of a very rich bargain. O heir of heaven, remember this, the small degree of grace thou hast, is given only as an earnest of more grace, yea, of eternal glory itself.

2. Another may be saying, Ah! but I want that love to God that a child should have to his father. Ans. 1. It is good thou art sensible of it, and that thou knowest thy wants. 2. Canst thou say it is thy greatest grief thou hast not more love to thy Father; yea, that thou wouldst give a world, if thou wast master of it, for more heart-love to him? Then take comfort, for there is sincerity of love to God in thy heart.

3. Another may say, I have not the spirit of prayer, which God useth to bestow on his children; I cannot attain to these enlargements and fluent expressions that I see others have in prayer. Ans. 1. It may be they are old experienced Christians thou conversest with, and they likewise have their ebbings and flowings as well as others; for the "Spirit blows when and where he listeth." Thou seest perhaps the one, but art unacquainted with the other. 2. It is thy happiness, thou hast to do in prayer with one that looks not so much to the words of the mouth, as the affections of the heart. If thou hast a heart centring on God, and flowing out towards him in duty. God loves that better than the most eloquent expressions.

4. Ah! saith some poor soul, I cannot attain to any tenderness of heart and frame in prayer. Ans. 1. Is it thy greatest grief and trouble that it is so? Then it is a good sign thou hast some tenderness in thy heart. 2. Dost thou look to thy elder brother, Jesus Christ, that he may plead for thee, and send his Spirit to help thy infirmities? Our blessed Lord Jesus has prayed for many that could not pray for themselves. Cry to him for the quickening influence of his Spirit, to enable you to call on his name; for he "gives his Spirit to them that ask him."

5. It may be some poor drooping soul is saying, I came to my Father's table yesterday, but instead of any comfortable discovery, all I got was a frown: my Father frowned, and seemed angry with me. Ans. 1. Thou hast reason to be thankful that he took any notice of thee at all; for sometimes God holds communion with his people by frowns and

reproofs, and thereby humbles them for sin, and draws them nearer to himself. 2. Perhaps God is correcting thee for some former sins against light, which as yet thou hast not mourned over: for those whom God takes into his family, and puts among his children, he will correct in his fatherly love, but “his loving-kindness he will not take away from them.” Let all the children of God, and heirs of heaven, submit, in a humble and kindly manner, to the reproofs and corrections of their heavenly Father. And let them say, as Elihu to Job, under his sharp trials, “What I see not, teach thou me. If I have done iniquity, I will do so no more.” Lord, train me up during my minority, as thou pleasest; make use of what discipline towards me thou thinkest best for me; only, if it be thy blessed will, make it known to me for my comfort, that I really belong to thy family, and shall not be shut out of doors for ever. And so my soul shall live and praise thy name. Amen.

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