

Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation for Sin

Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation for Sin

Arthur Hildersham

edited and introduced by
Lesley A. Rowe



Soli Deo Gloria Publications
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Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation for Sin

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Introduction

Arthur Hildersham was born on October 6, 1563, at Stetchworth, Cambridgeshire.¹ His family was devoutly Roman Catholic and, on his mother's side, was related to royalty. Hildersham was converted to the evangelical faith during his school days, and he mixed in Puritan circles when he attended Cambridge University. When he refused to comply with his father's demand that he enter the Roman Catholic priesthood, however, his parents disowned him. In his time of need, he was rescued by his relative Henry Hastings, the third Earl of Huntingdon (known as the "Puritan Earl"), who became his patron. After the completion of Hildersham's studies, the earl invited him to become his chaplain and lecturer at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire, in 1587.

Hildersham served as lecturer for six years, until he was appointed vicar of the town in 1593. He was a faithful gospel minister, preaching a powerful biblical message. People flocked to hear him, and there were many conversions. However, he was a ceremonial Nonconformist, and this brought

1. For more details on Hildersham's life, see Lesley A. Rowe, *The Life and Times of Arthur Hildersham: Prince among Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013). Some of the material for this introduction is drawn directly from chapter 12 of that book.

him into conflict with the Church of England authorities. He was one of the main organizers of the Puritan Millenary Petition, presented to King James I on his accession to the English throne in 1603. In 1605, Hildersham's Nonconformity resulted in his being dismissed from his post as vicar of Ashby, although he was able to continue preaching for some time as lecturer and in the surrounding areas. In 1613, he was banned from preaching completely; and in 1615, he was expelled from the ministry, excommunicated, heavily fined, and spent some time in prison. The unsubstantiated charge brought against him was that he was a ringleader of the "schismatics," fomenting discontent with the established church. Nevertheless, despite this silencing and persecution, Hildersham continued to live among the people of Ashby and served them as a loving friend and neighbor. In 1625, upon the death of King James I, Hildersham was relicensed as a minister, and he was able to preach again in Ashby in his capacity as lecturer. In the seven years before his death in 1632, at age sixty-eight, he delivered two sermon series. The one was on Psalm 35:13 (8 lectures), and the other on Psalm 51:1-7 (152 lectures). He died on Sunday, March 4, 1632, and was buried two days later with scenes of great mourning in the chancel of St. Helen's church, Ashby, where a monument to him was erected by his son Samuel.

Hildersham and his wife, Ann, had eight children, five of whom survived into adulthood. Their eldest son, Samuel, also entered the Church of England ministry and was later ejected for Nonconformity in 1662.

A Print History

Arthur Hildersham did not publish many books. His reluctance to go into print may have been due to his own modest estimation of the value of his writings when compared to those of others, or it may have been that he privileged preaching

over written communication. The low profile he was forced to adopt due to his suspensions, especially between 1611 and 1625, may also have played its part. During his lifetime, only two of his works found their way into print, and one of these was issued anonymously. This was his catechetical treatise, *The Doctrine of Communicating worthily in the Lord's Supper*, which first came out in 1609. It was appended to a treatise by William Bradshaw on the same subject entitled *A Direction for the weaker sort of Christians; showing in what manner they may be prepared to the worthy receiving of the Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ*. The other work by Hildersham that was published during his lifetime was a much longer effort, his *Lectures upon the Fourth of John*, which first appeared in 1629, eighteen years after having been preached as a series of 108 Tuesday morning lectures in Ashby-de-la-Zouch between 1609 and 1611.

After Hildersham's death in 1632, his eldest son, Samuel, set about preparing his father's papers for the press. The first of two posthumous works appeared the following year as *The Doctrine of Fasting and Prayer, and Humiliation for Sin*. It was a small, slim volume of 173 pages in its first edition, printed in quarto format. A second edition in duodecimo came out in 1636. As well as the eight sermons on Psalm 35:13, which were delivered during the national plague fast of 1625–1626, the book contains, with a separate title page and pagination, "A Sermon preached in Ashby-Chappell, Oct 4 1629." Although Hildersham did not approve of funeral sermons praising the life of any individual, this sermon, which deals with death and dying in a more general sense, was preached in the private Hastings Chapel in Ashby Castle the day after the burial of the Lady Sara Hastings, mother to his patron Henry, fifth Earl of Huntingdon.

In 1635, the second of Hildersham's posthumous works was published. The *CLII Lectures upon Psalm LI* was a massive

815-page folio volume, containing 152 lectures on Psalm 51:1–7. Hildersham had commenced this series during the plague fast of 1625 and had continued, with interruptions, until his final illness in December 1631. There are clear indications that the series was unfinished and that he had planned to carry on with his exposition before sickness and death intervened. There have been no complete reprinted editions of Arthur Hildersham's works since the seventeenth century.

The Context for His Lectures

The Doctrine of Fasting and Prayer is a series of eight lectures or sermons that were preached in Ashby in 1625–1626 in the context of a major plague epidemic. James I, king of England (who was also James VI of Scotland), had died on March 27, 1625, and was succeeded by his son, Charles I. On June 20, 1625, Hildersham, now age sixty-one, was relicensed to preach after a twelve-year suspension in the dioceses of London, Lincoln, and Coventry and Lichfield by Dr. Ridley, Archbishop Abbot's vicar-general. Within a few weeks of Hildersham's relicensing, which enabled him to return to his duties as lecturer (but not vicar) of Ashby, a national fast had been proclaimed. It is essential to understand a bit of the background to this situation in which Hildersham found himself on his return to preaching in Ashby.

During the late spring and early summer of 1625, a serious outbreak of plague occurred in London. The sickness quickly spread to all parts of the city, and by June 25 orders were given for parliament to be suspended and moved to Oxford. Apprehension soon infected other parts of the country too. People feared that tradesmen and refugees from London would transmit the disease into outlying towns and districts. In this climate of snowballing panic came an official proclamation on July 3 from the palace at Whitehall regarding a "public,

general and solemn fast” to be held throughout the land on Wednesday, July 20, 1625, and every Wednesday following as long as the plague lasted.² To ensure that the fast was properly observed, a service book, entitled *A Form of Common Prayer, Together with an Order of Fasting*, was also issued.

Although we cannot imagine our government today ordering a time of fasting and prayer during a period of national crisis, in Elizabethan and Stuart England it was almost a standard reaction. Elizabeth I, for example, had commanded a national fast during an outbreak of plague in 1563, and James I had acted similarly in the plague year of 1603. In addition to this particular fast in 1625, Charles I went on to order a further three fasts during the first five years of his reign. The Elizabethan *Book of Homilies*, devised by Cranmer, contained a sermon on fasting that set forth the need for such a response, “when God shall afflict a whole region or country with wars, with famine, with pestilence, with strange diseases and unknown sicknesses, and other such like calamities: then is it time for all states and sorts of people, high and low, men, women, and children, to humble themselves by fasting, and bewail their sinful living before God, and pray with one common voice.”³

In society as a whole, there was the belief that natural disasters and wars were to be regarded as a sign of God’s judgments upon a sinful land. This idea was reinforced from the pulpit, where preachers used Old Testament examples to show that such weighty providences could be averted, or at least ameliorated, by a corporate demonstration of repentance and humiliation during a period of national fasting. As

2. *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, Charles I 1625–1626* (London: HMSO, 1858), 48. For the full text of the proclamation, see J. F. Larkin, ed., *Stuart Royal Proclamations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 2:46–48.

3. *Sermons or Homilies to be read in Churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth* (London: n.p., 1817), 268.

with King Ahab, God might thus be induced “to alter the thing which he had purposed concerning him” by way of punishment.⁴ Hildersham also used Ahab’s example to explain that “the prayers of God’s people have even stayed Him and held His hand and prevailed so with Him that they have even overcome Him and compelled Him to change his mind and put up his sword.”⁵ King David, in 2 Samuel 24:17, was often cited as the chief model for penitence: “So King David in the time of plague and pestilence which ensued upon his vain numbering of the people prayed unto God with wonderful fervency, confessing his fault, desiring God to spare the people, and rather to turn his ire to himward, who had chiefly offended in that transgression.”⁶

Although there was general agreement that a fast was necessary to turn away God’s wrath, not everyone had the same ideas about what constituted true fasting. Many saw fasting as something that occurred on set days in the church calendar, notably Lent, which required the observance of special rules such as abstaining from particular foods and activities for fixed periods. For the Puritans, the emphasis was less on outer ritual and more on prayer and a deep, inner humiliation for sin. Puritan fasts became times when they could get together to hear God’s Word preached and seek His face in an atmosphere of mourning and prayerfulness. Days of fasting became special to the Puritans, but the authorities were increasingly suspicious of such gatherings, particularly when

4. *Homilies*, 269.

5. Arthur Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation for Sin*, ed. Lesley A. Rowe (1633; repr., Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 2017), 27. Originally *The Doctrine of fasting, and prayer, and humiliation for Sinne: Delivered in sundry sermons at the Fast appointed by publike authority, in the year 1625* (London: E. Brewster, 1633). Page numbers refer to this edition.

6. “The Preface,” *A Form of Common Prayer, Together with An Order of Fasting* (London, 1625).

they became associated with exorcism in the 1590s. The great era of public, godly fasting was thus brought to an end when unauthorized fasting was outlawed in the canons of 1604. There is evidence that the godly did not abandon communal fasting completely after this, with or without the licensing of a sympathetic bishop. It tended to be in smaller groups and less frequently, however, so as not to attract the attention of the authorities.

The 1620s in general were a period of increasing tension for the godly Calvinists in the Church of England. With the rising influence of Arminians and Laudians (who favored ceremony and ritual) in both church and state, many Puritans were feeling marginalized and defensive. In addition to rejecting the Puritan kind of spirituality, their opponents also challenged implicitly their loyalty to the Crown and the Church of England. However, the godly were eager to demonstrate their allegiance and support for both institutions. The declaration of a national fast, then, at the beginning of a new reign, provided an ideal opportunity for the Puritans to show their wholehearted support for the king's actions in an exercise of which they entirely approved.⁷ But they had to be careful. If they went too far or did not follow the rules, they were in danger of being branded as radicals, out of step with the national consensus.

For Hildersham, this balance between opportunity and trial was especially delicate. When he stepped into the pulpit in St. Helen's church, Ashby, on the fast day of Wednesday, August 3, 1625, all eyes were upon him. No doubt the church was full, despite it being a weekday morning, with people

7. John Preston, a close friend of Hildersham, was another Puritan who preached at the 1625 fast. His sermons were later issued as *The Golden Sceptre held forth to the humble* (1638).

eager to hear the great man preach again after so many years of silence. Attendance at the fast was obligatory by law for everyone, except those who could not be excused from their necessary duties. For his text, Hildersham chose not one but two psalms of David for his preaching material. The first of these choices was Psalm 35:13: “But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled myself with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.” Although this particular psalm was not listed in the fast’s official schedule of Bible passages and thus seems to have been Hildersham’s personal selection, the relevance to fasting is obvious. Hildersham delivered eight lectures on this verse between August 3, 1625, and August 2, 1626. Interestingly, in this verse David was not fasting because of his own sins but because of those of his enemies, which had caused them to be struck down with sickness. And so Hildersham, in the introductory part of his first sermon, cites David not as a model of repentance but as a “type of Christ,” praying for His enemies.

Hildersham used the example of David fasting and praying for his enemies as a means to try to engage his congregation with the national fast. It is clear from this first sermon that many in Ashby felt that a plague raging in London had very little to do with them. Although nearby Leicester was badly affected, Ashby seems to have remained largely plague free, at least in the early summer of 1625. Hildersham had been one of a group of leading citizens of Ashby who wrote to the mayor of Leicester to assure him of that fact in June 1625. The distance of Ashby from London, the apparent lack of plague in Ashby itself, and a reliance on human precautions lulled many into a sense of personal security, as they argued: “I am far enough from London. I dwell in a good air, and we have taken good order to prevent all danger of this infectious

disease. No carriers shall come from thence to us; no Londoners shall lodge among us.”⁸

But the example of David, who was affected by the sickness of his enemies, allowed Hildersham to declare this doctrine to his hearers: “God’s people ought to take to heart the miseries and calamities of others, the judgments of God that do befall others.”⁹ For, said Hildersham, these plague victims in London were not their enemies even, but their fellow countrymen and in many instances their own flesh and blood. If David could pray for his enemies, surely they should be interceding for their brethren. Besides, they too could be struck down by plague. Hildersham warns his listeners against complacency; he draws a sobering picture of the sudden onset, the effects, and the unpredictable nature of the sickness, of people “dying in the streets and high-ways” with friends afraid to attend them. Those suffering were not greater sinners than the folk in Ashby, he went on; besides, God sometimes afflicted some to warn all of impending judgment.

Hildersham was aware that many unconverted people who were not often in church were in the congregation on the occasion of the fast, so he was determined to challenge them. He observed, “Many have joined with us whose persons God never yet accepted.”¹⁰ Later, he asserted, “Many of you never yet had any comfort in God, in the assurance of the pardon of your sins, never found sweetness in Christ nor in God’s promises.”¹¹ In an evangelistic thrust, which took in all his hearers, Hildersham declared that no one could think he could fly from God’s judgment if he had not removed the cause of it—namely, sin—from his own life. “It behooves us,”

8. Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation*, 10.

9. Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation*, 2.

10. Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation*, 38.

11. Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation*, 82.

urged Hildersham, “(without delay) by all means to make our peace with God, and to seek reconciliation with him.” “This,” he stressed, “and this only is the way unto true safety and comfort”; and, he went on, “Now is the time to do it, if ever we will do it, now that his hand is so stretched out against us.” Hildersham then proceeds to explain the three things which must be done to achieve that peace with God—that is, a full and free confession of sin, an unfeigned resolution to forsake sin, and a striving “by a lively faith to lay hold on God’s mercy in Christ and to get His blood sprinkled upon your heart.”¹²

Repentance was needed on both an individual and a corporate level, for the judgment of God was upon the entire nation. “He is angry, and...not with the Londoners only, but with us, with the whole land.... It may be more with us than with them.”¹³ Having examined the particular sins for which the Israelites were punished by plague throughout the Old Testament, Hildersham concludes, “It is evident that we and our nation are guilty of all these sins.” The catalog includes unthankfulness for past mercies, especially for “our deliverance out of that spiritual Egypt” (i.e., Catholicism at the time of the Reformation); contempt for the ministry of the Word; sexual immorality, which “doth everywhere so increase and abound in our land”; a reliance on human strength; indiscriminate reception of the Lord’s Supper; neglect of public worship; and a hardening of hearts against previous judgments.

Some of the godly brethren who usually frequented Hildersham’s lectures and attended fast days felt uncomfortable that “many of these lewd men that are guilty of these foul sins intrude themselves into our assemblies and join with us

12. Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation*, 19–20.

13. Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation*, 13.

in these holy duties.”¹⁴ “And,” agreed Hildersham, “we know that ‘the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the LORD.’”¹⁵ He explained to these unhappy believers, however, that although private fasting should not be attempted by the unconverted, in “public and general calamities they may be enjoined to keep a fast that have no such measure of grace in them.”¹⁶ Indeed, he goes on, “it has greatly furthered the efficacy of the prayers of God’s own people, when in such a case all have come (tag and rag, as we say) to join with them in this service.”¹⁷ For although the fullest spiritual blessings were reserved for believers, in a limited and temporal way “God hath oft had respect to the cries even of such as have had no truth of grace.” Taking to heart God’s judgments, professing their humility, and obeying the commandment of the temporal authorities to attend the fast were all “good things” that demonstrated the “remainders of God’s image” even in the ungodly, which was something God loved to see. Besides, Hildersham’s desire was that the ungodly and hypocritical people present would be converted. At times of divine “grievous visitation,” he explained, “we find by experience that...a faithful minister may much better work upon the hearts of men to bring them to remorse and repentance than at another time.” People should learn to interpret the signs aright, for “every judgment of God has a voice and is a real sermon of repentance.” Hildersham concluded, “Certainly if in such a time the word do not work upon men’s hearts, it will never do them good.”¹⁸

14. Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation*, 41.

15. Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation*, 41.

16. Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation*, 55.

17. Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation*, 55–56.

18. Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation*, 5, 56, 103.

Hildersham admonished his hearers that a failure to heed the current warning of the plague could result in England receiving the greater judgment from which it had so far been spared—"I mean, war."¹⁹ Sin with which one did not deal was the sin of Achan (Josh. 7:1–26), which resulted in the whole community remaining under God's wrath until the offenses were discovered and punished. This communal repentance could only be achieved, however, if every individual searched his own conscience before God: "We know not the meaning of the plague nor make right use of it, unless every one of us enter into his own heart and say, 'What have I done?'"²⁰

Having engaged his listeners with the current situation and demonstrated the need for each one to be involved, Hildersham moves on after the first couple of sermons to a detailed explanation of what true repentance and prayer entails. Even the bodily exercise of fasting, which is defined and described in sermons 3 and 4, is shown to be merely a means to the end of genuine humiliation for sin. Of what this sincere mourning for sin consists is outlined in sermon 4, and the motives and means to attain it in sermons 5, 6, and 7. Preached some months later, sermon 8 supplies guidelines for each listener to evaluate how far he had progressed in being truly humbled before God in his own life.

After four sermons on Psalm 35:13, while the national fast was still in operation, Hildersham commenced his exposition of Psalm 51:1–7 on Wednesday, September 28, 1625. The two series alternated until Wednesday, December 21, by which time he had delivered seven sermons on Psalm 35 and nine on Psalm 51. By then, it could be safely said that the plague was over, and Hildersham reverted to the normal lecture day

19. Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation*, 12.

20. Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation*, 13–14.

of Tuesday for the remainder of the series on Psalm 51. But the genesis of this great series was to be found in the plague of 1625. The same themes of heartfelt repentance and mourning over sin were expounded from both texts.

The circumstances of that plague summer of 1625 of a nation under God's judgment were sobering. To this was added bitter personal grief for Hildersham. In August 1625, the same month that he recommenced preaching in Ashby, his beloved elder daughter, Anna, was buried in the churchyard there. We do not know if Anna, a young mother and wife, age thirty-one, died of plague or other causes, but her death was shortly followed by the deaths of her two children, Elizabeth and Thomas. Aside from this tragedy, these were sweet days for Hildersham—the fulfillment of the promise given to him by God a year earlier that he would live to declare His name again.²¹

Modern Relevance and Value in Reprinting

The fact that no book by Arthur Hildersham is in print today is in itself sufficient reason to reissue one of his works. He was a major Puritan figure, much esteemed in his day for his wisdom, learning, and piety. Modern editions of Puritan authors have appeared in droves over recent years, but Hildersham has been overlooked.²² It is true that Hildersham is less accessible than some other Puritan writers because of a rather ponderous style, but a study of his work will richly repay the careful reader in terms of its godly and biblical teaching.

21. In August 1624, Hildersham had been desparately ill but was overheard uttering the words of Psalm 118:17: "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD." See Rowe, *Life and Times of Arthur Hildersham*, 124.

22. A booklet reprinting a few of Hildersham's lectures on Psalm 51 was issued in 2004 under the title *Dealing with Sin in Our Children* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2004).

C. H. Spurgeon highly valued Hildersham's works and heartily recommended them, though admitted that his style was "copious and discursive, we had almost said long-winded."²³ Perhaps the sheer length of Hildersham's two major works, *Lectures upon the Fourth of John* (1629) and *CLII Lectures upon Psalm LI* (1635) (at more than five hundred and eight hundred pages, respectively), to which Spurgeon was referring, has daunted some modern publishers. Hildersham's two shorter volumes, however, supply a more manageable prospect: *The Doctrine of Communicating worthily in the Lords Supper* (1609) and *The Doctrine of Fasting and Prayer, and Humiliation for Sin* (1633). Both are relatively brief, and the arguments more easily followed. Both have much to say that is relevant to us today, and the second work in particular has a power and urgency that transcends its original context. There is no sense in which it could be described as long-winded. Hildersham's voice still deserves to be heard; it has been silent too long.

How much today do people need an urgent reminder to heed the warnings given by all natural disasters or epidemics of infectious diseases, warnings that God will judge the human race for its sinfulness and rebellion. *The Doctrine of Fasting and Prayer* emphasizes the seriousness of sin and its consequences in a powerful way. Hildersham's message of the necessity of repentance (both corporate and individual), the need to ensure that we are right with God, is a timely one for our generation, as is his exhortation to be more engaged with the sufferings of others in prayer and practical support. The practice of fasting and humbling oneself before God, particularly in times of national or international disaster, is too

23. C. H. Spurgeon, "Catalogue of Biblical Commentaries & Expositions," in *Commenting and Commentaries* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 33, 99.

often a neglected discipline today. Hildersham teaches us how to approach it and why it is still important. Throughout, his lectures are thoroughly biblical in content and are amply supported by scriptural examples.

A Note on Editing the Text

Samuel Hildersham assured the first readers of his father's book that the words printed were the very words he had written. Similarly, I have endeavored to remain faithful to Hildersham's original text so that his own voice will still speak to us. I have modernized the spelling and altered punctuation to conform to more modern sensibilities. Throughout, I have changed Hildersham's use of "thee" and "thou" (and the corresponding forms of the verbs) for the second person singular (used when addressing individual people in his audience) to the present day usage of "you." I have reproduced Hildersham's Bible references unchanged, however, so that God is always addressed as "Thee" and "Thou." I have provided historical explanations and modern equivalents of archaic words in footnotes where applicable, and added at times headings to aid in tracking Hildersham's arguments.

—Lesley A. Rowe

The Epistle Dedicatory

TO HIS MOST WORTHY AND MUCH HONORED PATRON,
Master William Cokayne, Merchant, at his house in
Austin Fryers in London.¹

Sir,

I hope the world will not blame me for increasing the crowd of English writers with which it is so much troubled nor censure me of folly for thrusting this little book into the throng, where it is like to be smothered, if I may be admitted to put in this plea. To the first, that as a dutiful son in honor of my dear father's name and memory I strive for some place for this monument, which may be some means to perpetuate the same in God's church; as a faithful executor, I am careful to discharge this part of his (though but nuncupative) will,² to endeavor the publishing of this and some other of his works, which himself intended and had prepared for the press. To the latter, I plead that though it be in itself but small, yet will it

1. The epistle dedicatory, written by Samuel Hildersham, dedicates the book to his patron, the godly London merchant William Cokayne.

2. Samuel was named as the executor of Arthur's will. "Nuncupative" means unwritten (i.e., verbal).

find in the throng a book to which it is nearly³ allied, a child of the same author's brain and heart (the lectures on St. John 4), which, having found free and speedy passage, will make way for this and easily procure it welcome and entertainment, where itself has found the like; and I presume elsewhere also, for so much as the company of this may be procured at a far easier charge than the former.⁴ And as it has one already to lead the way, so (God willing) 'ere long (I hope) it shall be seconded by another of later birth, but greater growth.⁵ It no way becomes me to commend this or any other work of his (let me rather strive to imitate him myself, than to commend him or anything of his to others). His very name will commend them. At least under that name, the reader should suspect he may be abused, I here solemnly promise that what is or shall be by me published under his name shall not be loose notes (that have been taken by some ignorant scribe), nor shall it be made up with additions and alterations of my own, but the copies under his own hand carefully transcribed.⁶

And as for publishing these sermons, I have good reason so for dedicating them to yourself. The occasion of them was that heavy visitation⁷ which was then upon your city. The drift of one part of them was to move his auditors⁸ to commiserate the (then) woeful estate of it. To you therefore as a citizen (of no mean note) have I directed them, but principally to you as my patron. I have not nor expect anything of mine own worthy public view. This I own not as author, but as heir to

3. *Nearly*: closely.

4. This small book is much cheaper than the *Lectures on John 4*.

5. He is referring to the *Lectures on Psalm 51*, eight hundred pages long, which was to be published in 1635.

6. Samuel is assuring the reader that the text is as Arthur Hildersham himself wrote it.

7. A serious outbreak of plague in 1625.

8. *Auditors*: hearers.

the author; and it being in mine hands, I thought it my duty (being the first book I had to dispose of) to present it first into those hands which freely bestowed the presentation to this parsonage upon me.⁹ I have been for above these four years covetous of some fair opportunity to witness to the world my thankful acknowledgment of your favor to me and to give public testimony of your worthy and exemplary integrity in discharging the trust reposed in you (to dispose of this benefice) without respect to your own gain or pleasuring of your friends, neglecting bribes of breath or money. You intended not to enrich yourself by this part of the church's patrimony nor to make up other losses by gaining by this. It was your care not only to shun the grievous sin of simony and corruption but to avoid all suspicion of it; you passed by the near relation of kindred, the importunate solicitation of friends, the mediation of great personages, and were pleased in your choice to crave the direction of your pious, learned, and most industrious pastor the great blessing and ornament of your city and parish.¹⁰ His love (which I may never forget, though I shall not in any degree requite) induced him to nominate me. Your confidence in his judgment and uprightness made you upon his commendation to make choice of me, a mere stranger, for your clerk. Never had any parson or parish more cause thankfully to acknowledge the religious care and pious integrity of a patron than we here have, or take any occasion to lay this your good work open to wide report and to propound you as a pattern, to them that are entrusted with such

9. The parish living of West Felton in Shropshire, which Cokayne as patron had presented to Samuel Hildersham in 1628. He served as minister there until his ejection in 1662.

10. This may be a reference to William Gouge, minister of St Anne's, Blackfriars (1608–1653). Arthur Hildersham had recommended him to the parishioners in 1608.

charges. I do and shall praise God as long as I live for raising you (beyond my thoughts and expectations) an instrument of so great good to me. By your means He has freed me from those snares, wherein many of our coat¹¹ are (in these corrupt times) entangled. I do not eat the bread of (either direct or indirect) simony, but that which by God's providence, your uncorrupt hand has reached out to me, a morsel of which will give me more content than abundance of the former sort. I doubt not, but God will abundantly requite your kindness to His house, that He will bless you in your merchandise and exchanges, who have been so careful not to make merchandise of the souls of men or to make sale of the patrimony of the church and portion of God's ministers; that He will continue and increase your comfort in your hopeful children, who have been so faithful a guardian to this people;¹² but principally that He will bless you in your soul with spiritual and heavenly graces and comfort, the means of which you have been so careful to provide for this place. For all which (as I hope), so I shall continually pray. And such prayers are the best and only requital I can make and that I know, which you will accept of, together with this mine acknowledgment, before witness and upon record that I am,

Yours in the bonds of thankfulness most obliged,

SAMUEL HILDERSHAM

West Felton in Salop¹³

December 8, 1632

11. *Many of our coat*: Nonconformists, or Puritans, within the Church of England.

12. The parishioners of West Felton.

13. Shropshire.

The Author's Prayer before His Lecture

*T*hy Word, O Lord, is holy and pure, as is Thine own majesty; and, being sincerely preached, works either to the salvation or condemnation of the hearers. And we all that are here assembled before Thee at this time are of uncircumcised hearts and ears—utterly unworthy by reason of that sin wherein we were conceived and born, and of those actual transgressions that we have multiplied against Thy majesty in thought, word, and deed, from our first being until this present hour once to set foot into Thy temple or to hear Thy Word at all; utterly unfit and unable by reason of our custom in sin and the hardness of our hearts to profit by it, when as we hear it.

So that, Lord, we are at this time in danger to be unprofitable hearers of Thy holy Word, and by being unprofitable hearers of the same we are in danger of Thy heavy displeasure. Yet forasmuch as it hath pleased Thee in mercy to command us this exercise, to appoint it to be the only ordinary means whereby Thou wilt work faith and repentance in Thy children, and the principal means whereby Thou wilt increase them, to promise also graciously that Thou wilt accompany the outward ministry of Thy Word with the inward grace and blessing of Thy Spirit in the hearts of them that shall be reverently and faithfully exercised in the same.

We therefore, in humble obedience to this Thy holy commandment and in full affiance and confidence in this Thy gracious promise, are bold to present ourselves before Thee at this time, beseeching Thee in Thy Son's blood to wash away all our sins, so as they may never be laid to our charge again, either in the world to come to our condemnation or at this time to bring a curse upon this our exercise. Good Lord, so sprinkle that blood of Thy Son upon our consciences that we may be assured of Thy love and favor toward us in Him. By it, sanctify us at this time and Thy Word to our uses, opening and enlightening our understanding so as we may be able to understand and conceive of Thy Word aright, strengthening our memories so as we may be able to remember it, softening our hard and stony hearts so as we may be able to believe it, to yield unto it, to apply it to our own souls, to meditate and confer thereupon, to practice it in our lives and conversations, to stir up one another to the obedience thereof, that this our exercise may tend to the increase of our knowledge and of our obedience, of our faith, and of repentance, the glory of Thy blessed name, and the everlasting comfort of our own souls.

Hear us, O Lord, in these our requests, in what else soever Thou knowest good for us or any of Thy church, for Jesus Christ's sake, our Lord and only Savior, in whose name we continue our prayers unto Thee, as He Himself has taught us, saying,

Our Father which art in heaven, etc.

SERMON 1

August 3, 1625

But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled myself with fasting: and my prayer returned into mine own bosom. —Psalm 35:13

Not to take up time in speaking of the former part of this psalm, these words have this coherence and dependence on that which went before: David, as a type of Christ, having many mortal enemies, does in this psalm (by a prophetic spirit) pray against them or rather foretell what should befall them. In this verse and the former, to show what cause he had to do so, he aggravates their sin by their unthankfulness in dealing so badly with him that had deserved so well of them.

The parts of this verse are two—namely, a profession of (1) the kindness he showed to these men, wherein observe: the *time* when he did it and the occasion he took to do it, “when they were sick.” The *duty* whereby he expressed his love, [in that] he prayed for them, which is amplified by the extraordinary manner of it, set forth by the *outward helps* he used in it—that is, sackcloth and fasting. And, the *inward disposition* of his mind in it: he humbled, or afflicted, his soul. (2) The success and comfort he found in it.¹

1. These two points are set out as a Ramist tree in the original.

Note 1. Observe first David's practice. He was wont² when these men were sick to be affected with their misery, which teaches us that:

DOCTRINE 1. God's people ought to take to heart the miseries and calamities of others, the judgments of God that do befall others.

See for proof of this both the examples of His servants and then God's commandment also.

Proof 1. When Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar heard of Job's misery, they "came to mourn with him" (Job 2:11). But he was a rare man for piety and authority also (you will say). See therefore another example of this duty performed toward them that were not so: "Did not I weep for him that was in trouble?" says Job (30:25). "Was not my soul grieved for the poor?" Yea, see an example of this toward most wicked men in Judges 21:2. The people of Israel came to the house of God (as we do now) to profess their sorrow for the extreme misery that the wicked Benjamites were most justly fallen into.

Proof 2. Yea, we are straitly charged by the Lord to do so, to remember and think of them as if their case were our own. "Remember them that are in bonds," says the apostle, "as bound with them: and them that are in adversity, as being yourselves also in the body" (Heb. 13:3). Yea, to do it with hearty commiseration: "Weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15). Yea, if the judgment be famous and exemplary, we are commanded also to make public and solemn profession (as we do at this day) that we are affected with their misery: "Let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the LORD hath kindled" (Lev. 10:6).

2. *Wont*: to be accustomed.

The Reasons

Three special reasons and grounds there be for this doctrine, for we should take to heart the miseries and calamities of others.

Reason 1

First, in respect had to them that are afflicted. For, admit³ they were not our fellow members in Christ nor our kindred or acquaintance nor our countrymen. Admit they were mere strangers to us; admit they were all most wicked men. Yet nature binds us to be affected with their miseries, because they are our own flesh. “Hide not thyself from thine own flesh” (Isa. 58:7). And he that has not humanity and natural affection in him certainly has no grace but is given up to a reprobate mind, as the apostle teaches us in Romans 1:31. Yea, it is an argument of a cruel heart to be void of natural commiseration and careless of other men, whether they sink or swim. In this Cain first bewrayed⁴ his murderous heart when he said of his brother in Genesis 4:9, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” And so did the chief priests and elders, when, hearing Judas cry out of himself for his sin and beholding him in the pangs of desperation, they said unto him, “What is that to us? see thou to that” (Matt. 27:4).

Reason 2

Secondly, in respect had unto the Lord, who by these judgments executed upon others does manifest from heaven that His wrath is kindled, that He is in a fury. So that not to be affected with His judgments executed upon others is a double contempt done to the Lord Himself, in that we are not moved

3. *Admit*: even if.

4. *Bewrayed*: revealed.

nor tremble to see Him angry. “The lion hath roared, who will not fear?” (Amos 3:8). It is hard to find a man so stout and courageous (shall I say?), nay, so senseless or profane that trembles not sometimes at the fearful thunderclaps and lightnings, because God therein manifests His glorious power and because that though He strike not many with them usually, yet some He does. But there is much more cause to tremble and be affected with His general and extraordinary judgments upon others. For thereby He does not only manifest His glorious power but His revenging justice also and anger against sin, which is much more terrible than the other. See a proof of this in Ezekiel 32:10: “The kings of the nations shall be horribly afraid for thee, when I shall brandish my sword before them, and they shall tremble at every moment; every man for his own life, in the day of thy fast.” The heathen, that had no goodness in them at all, when they should behold how terrible God was in His judgments upon His own people, should be in continual fear that He would destroy them also—as the scholar⁵ that is himself faulty and obnoxious to the rod when he sees his master in a fury against any of his fellows cannot choose but tremble, unless he be desperate. This made the prophet Isaiah (when God had in a vision manifested to him His glory), when he saw “the posts of the” temple “door moved at the voice of the angel that cried, and the house filled with smoke,” to cry out (from the very consciousness of his own sinfulness and deserts), “Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:4–5).

There is in this another contempt also done unto God, because God never smites some but to warn all what is due to

5. *Scholar*: schoolboy.

them and what they must look for, unless they repent. Even those executions which the magistrate does by God's appointment upon foul offenders are done chiefly to warn others: "All Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is, amongst you" (Deut. 13:11). But much more those judgments which the Lord Himself has executed upon any (either immediately or by His destroying angels) are intended chiefly for the instruction and warning of others. "The righteous shall see and fear," says David in Psalm 52:6. The Lord consumed the Sodomites in that fearful manner "to make them an example to those that after should live ungodly" (2 Peter 2:6). And the earth swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, not only out of that respect God had to the glory of His own justice in taking vengeance on them for all their sins, but that they might become a sign unto others, as the Holy Ghost says expressly in Numbers 26:10. Every judgment of God has a voice and is a real sermon of repentance; and the more general and extraordinary the judgment is, by so much the louder and more audible voice it has. And it is therefore a contempt done to God when we regard it not nor hearken unto it. "Hear the rod, and who hath appointed it" (Mic. 6:9).

Reason 3

The third and last reason and ground of the doctrine is in respect had to ourselves. For there is no judgment executed upon others (especially if it be any whit public and general, and more than ordinary), but we are all to take ourselves interested in it, yea, to have had a hand in provoking the Lord unto it. For as sin is the cause of all God's judgments that come upon a land, so we must not judge them the greatest sinners always upon whom they light. "Those eighteen upon whom the tower of Silo[am] fell, think ye," says our Savior in Luke 13:4-5, "that they were sinners above all that dwelt in

Jerusalem? I tell you nay.” Neither must we think that the sins of those whom God smites with His judgments are the only cause of the judgments or that He is angry with them only, but know that He is as well angry oft times with those He spares, as with those whom He smites. And the sins of those whom He spares have oft a stronger hand in plucking down the judgment than the sins of those whom He smites have had. Two notable examples we have for this in the time of David. It was a fearful judgment that God executed upon Uzza in 1 Chronicles 13:10: “The anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him, because he put his hand to the ark.” And it is said in verse 12 that the judgment upon Uzza much affected David and made his heart quake. And why so? Surely, because he knew that God was not angry with Uzza only, but with the whole congregation. “The LORD our God,” says David in 1 Chronicles 15:13, “made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order.” He knew that the sins of the priests and others that were spared provoked God to that judgment more than Uzza’s did, as appears in the beginning of that verse: “for, because ye did it not at the first, the LORD our God,” etc. The second example is in 2 Samuel 24. It was a fearful judgment that is mentioned in the fifteenth verse, when “by a pestilence that the LORD sent upon Israel” in three days “there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men”—and they that were slain had (doubtless) sin enough in themselves to deserve it. But was their sin the only or the chief cause of that judgment? No, certainly, the sin of those that were spared was the chief cause of it, as David confesses in verse 17: “Lo, I have sinned, and have done wickedly, but these sheep, what have they done?” He knew well that not the sins of those that perished in that grievous plague but his own sins had a chief hand in provoking God unto that judgment. So that we see that there is no one man among

us all that has not just reason to be affected with God's judgments upon the land, though himself be spared, seeing that he is a cause of it as well as they that are smitten and (it may be) as great a cause as they, nay (it may be), a greater cause than any of them were.

And this was that that made good Nehemiah cry thus in his prayer unto God, "Both I and my father's house have sinned" (Neh. 1:6). As if he had said that Jerusalem prospers no better; "I and my father's house are as great a cause as any other."

We have heard the doctrine which this example of David teaches us delivered and confirmed in a general manner. Let us now come to make use of it and to apply it to our own case and to the occasion of our meeting at this time.

The Uses

This doctrine therefore serves to exhort us unto two duties: (1) that we would labor to take to heart and to be rightly affected with this judgment of God that is now upon London and sundry other parts of the kingdom;⁶ (2) that when we are rightly affected with it, we would make right use of it to ourselves.

Use 1

Objection. For the first, you will say it is a needless exhortation, for who is not affected with this plague? Who is not afraid of it, and wherefore come we hither else, if we be not affected with it? *Answer.* I answer that none of us (I fear) are sufficiently affected with it and that this is the fountain and foundation of all good uses we can make of it, either for their benefit that are visited with it or for ourselves, that we would labor to be affected with this judgment of God as we ought to be. I

6. The plague.

will therefore show you what just causes we have to be deeply affected with this judgment, and they are principally three:

First, in respect of the grievousness of the judgment itself. For we shall find this called one of God's sore judgments (Ezek. 14:21). And when the Lord threatens that He Himself would fight against Jerusalem "with an outstretched hand, and a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath" (Jer. 21:5), He tells them in the next verse how He would do this: He would "smite the city with a great pestilence." Certainly, the Lord therefore now fights against our land. Yea, He fights against it in fury and in great wrath. Observe four things in this judgment:

What a waster it is. In Psalm 91:6, it is called the "destruction that wasteth at noonday." In a short time, even in three days, it consumed seventy thousand in Israel (2 Sam. 24:15). A grievous judgment it must be, when God Himself matches a pestilence of three days' continuance (as a thing of equal force to afflict and destroy) with a famine of seven years and with flying by the space of three months before their enemies that pursued them, as we know He does in 2 Samuel 24:13. And has not the pestilence that God has now sent into our land proved a terrible waster, when in one week in one city it has swept away 3,582?⁷

Consider how suddenly it takes them away that have been smitten with it. Many that were well in the morning have been dead of it before night. It is therefore called the Lord's "arrow" in Psalm 91:5. It strikes and pierces men suddenly with a deadly wound; and, in verse 6, it is said to "walk in darkness." And certainly, sudden death, though it be not absolutely to be prayed against, yet it is to be esteemed a temporal judgment

7. London. Bills of mortality were compiled each week, listing the number of deaths.

and a sign of God's anger. "Let destruction come upon him at unawares," says the prophet here in [Psalm 35:]8. It must needs add much to the bitterness of death when it comes so suddenly that a man can neither commend himself to God nor set things in order for the world before he die.

Consider it is such a judgment as oft makes men destroyers of them whom they most love and desire to keep alive: the father setting at unawares the infection upon the child, the husband upon the wife, a man on his dearest friend. A great cause of humbling it is for a man to have killed any other man at unawares, as you may see by that law in Numbers 35:28. And what is it then to have killed them that are dearest to them?

It is such a sickness as does (usually) debar men of many comforts that other sick persons do enjoy. First, many that are visited with this sickness do want convenient attendance and lodging, dying in the streets and highways, of whom that may be said in Isaiah 51:20, "Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all streets, the fury of the LORD, the rebuke of thy God."

Secondly, their friends dare not visit them, which as it is a work of mercy so it is a great means of comfort to the afflicted, and such as Christ has enjoined us (Matt. 25:36).

Thirdly, whereas none have so much need of spiritual comfort as they because the very disease makes them more subject to terrors and fears than others (and is therefore called "the terror by night" in Psalm 91:5), they (poor wretches) can have none to comfort them, but in anguish of soul cry out, "The comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me" (Lam. 1:16). So that in respect of this first consideration, the grievousness of the judgment itself, they may cry to us all and to God's people throughout the land, as in Lamentations 1:12, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, wherewith the LORD

hath afflicted me in the day of his anger.” And will you not be affected with it?

Secondly, if this will not serve, come to a second cause we have to be deeply affected with it, because none of us can tell how far it may go, how near it may come to our dwellings. In which respect, though we may say, as Numbers 16:46, we are sure “wrath is gone out from the LORD, the plague is begun,” yet as the psalmist says in Psalm 74:9, “There is not amongst us any that knoweth how long it will last, or how far it will spread.”

Let no man say, “I am far enough from London. I dwell in a good air,⁸ and we have taken good order to prevent all danger of this infectious disease. No carriers shall come from thence to us; no Londoners shall lodge among us.” These are good means, I will not deny (if they be used with that compassion that becomes Christians to show unto them in misery), and must not be neglected. But all these cannot secure us from the plague. If we do not first make our peace with God, all these are in vain. If we bear in our bosom the cause of the plague, if we nourish and increase it daily (I mean our sins), we cannot be sure to keep it from our towns and houses, do what we can. Know you for a surety it is God that sends the pestilence, as He says in 2 Chronicles 7:13. In this judgment (above others), we are said to fall into the Lord’s hands, as David speaks in 2 Samuel 24:14. And as He sends it, so He only guides it whither it shall go and whither it shall not go, whom it shall smite and whom it shall spare. And though He do usually send it by outward and ordinary means, yet He does not so always. Some that live in the thickest of them that are infected and in a most corrupt air do escape; some that fly from the places infected into the purest air are infected, they know not how. How many physicians and surgeons and nurses and keepers that have been

8. At this time many believed the plague to be an airborne disease.

wont to visit the infected, to sweat them, to dress their sores, to wash their linen, yea, how many that have daily conversed with them and lain in bed with them also have been known to escape the infection altogether? Whereas many that have been most careful to keep themselves from all that have been infected and to use all good preservatives against the contagion have been taken by it. No man may argue from hence (as some foolishly have done) that this disease is not in its own nature more infectious than other diseases are. No more than from this, that the three noble Jews that were cast into Nebuchadnezzar's furnace received no hurt at all by it (Dan. 3:27), and that oft times one house in a street or room in a house escape burning in the greatest fires that have been heard of, a man may conclude that fire is not in itself of a burning or consuming nature. But in this, as in the other, the finger and power of God is to be acknowledged in restraining and setting bounds to this heavy judgment, as pleases Him. And this the Lord (doubtless) does to hearten and encourage them that are whole, to perform all necessary duties of mercy and love to them that are sick. And as the Lord can thus limit the plague of pestilence, so can He (if He please) command it to go through our whole land before it cease, as He did through the land of Israel "from Dan to Beersheba" (2 Sam. 24:15). Though we fly from it, He can follow and pursue us with it, as He has done many times and threatens. "I will persecute" and follow them "with the pestilence," says He in Jeremiah 29:18. Though we shut our doors against it, He can make it come in at our windows, as they complain in Jeremiah 9:21, "Death is come up to our windows, and is entered into our palaces." Let no man think he can be sure to avoid this judgment by flying from it, if he be not careful to remove the cause of it and to make his peace with God. Do therefore (before it come nearer to you), as the Lord Himself counsels you, "Prepare to meet

thy God” (Amos 4:12). And because you can have no assurance in yourself that you shall be able to avoid the danger of the indignation of this King that comes against you (for aught you know) with so great a power, learn that wisdom that our Savior directs you unto in Luke 14:32: while He is yet a great way off, “send an ambassage, and desire conditions of peace” with Him. If you would be free from the fear of the plague, fear God aright. “Be not afraid,” says the prophet in Isaiah 8:12–13, “sanctify the LORD of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.” If we could fear the Lord as we ought, we should not need to fear anything else in the world. Be sure to make your peace with Him—which how you may do, I will tell you by and by.

Thirdly and lastly (to cause us to take to heart and to be affected with this fearful plague), consider that if this judgment be neglected, as great as it is, it will be but a forerunner of some more fearful judgment than this is. And as our Savior speaks in another case, this will be but the beginning of our sorrows (Matt. 24:8). There is a judgment that this nation has hitherto been preserved from, to the astonishment and admiration⁹ of all the world, that is greater than this, for it uses to bring this and the famine also with it—I mean, war. The sword of our bloody and merciless enemies is worse than the plague. This is plain by David’s choice in 2 Samuel 24:14, “Let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man.” And surely we have cause to fear that if this will do us no good, God cannot endure to have His judgments despised. Hear what He says in Leviticus 26:18: “If you will not for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.” And certainly I may say to all you that hear me this day, if you regard not nor

9. *Admiration*: wonder.

profit by this fearful plague you hear of in London and other parts of the land, God will either bring it home to you or a worse plague than it. “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

Use 2

The second duty that this doctrine serves to exhort us to is that we would make right use of this judgment of God that is upon the land unto ourselves. And that stands in four points.

First, seeing (1) God gives us in this judgment such cause of sorrow, seeing He is angry, and (2) not with the Londoners only, but with us, with the whole land. And (3) it may be more with us than with them, and (4) seeing we know not how soon this fire that burns our neighbor’s house may light upon ours. We must therefore examine every one of us our own ways. This direction is given us in Lamentations 3:39–40: “Wherefore doth a living man complain; a man for the punishment of his sins?” As if the church there should say, why do men mourn and fret and take on so for this judgment of God that is justly fallen upon them? Why do they not betake themselves to the right course for the pacifying of God’s wrath? Which is this, and this only: “Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.” Every one of us should say thus within himself: “Surely the Lord is very angry with the whole land, with every one of us. And what have I done to anger the Lord thus, to provoke Him to this wrath?” The Lord charges the Jews that they did not know His judgment because “no man said, what have I done?” (Jer. 8:6–7). And so surely will He judge of us. We know not the meaning of the plague nor make right use of it, unless every one of us enter into his own heart and say, “What have I done?” To this end it will be profitable for us to search the Scriptures and find out what were the special sins which either have brought the pestilence upon God’s people

in former times or which the Lord has threatened to punish in this manner and with this judgment.

For the first, I find five great plagues of pestilence recorded in the Holy Scriptures, and the special sins that were the causes of them are also plainly set down. The first great plague we read of was that which is spoken of in Numbers 11:33: “The wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague.” And what was the cause of that plague? Surely, their murmuring and discontentment at their present condition; their unthankfulness to the Lord, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt (v. 20); their loathing of manna (v. 6), which the prophet for the excellency thereof calls “angels’ food” in Psalm 78:25 and the “corn and bread of heaven” in Psalm 78:24, 105:40; their lusting after the flesh pots of Egypt and longing to be there again (Ex. 16:3; Num. 11:4–5).

Secondly, another we find mentioned in Numbers 14 where, although the Lord was stayed by the prayer of Moses from smiting the whole congregation with the pestilence and from disinheriting them as He threatened to do in verse 6, yet often of those men that were sent to search out the land, it is said in verse 37 that they “died of the plague before the LORD.” And the cause of this is said to be that they “did bring up a slander and evil report” (vv. 36–37) upon the Promised Land and thereby made all the congregation to murmur against Moses, who had spoken so much good of it.

Thirdly, another great plague Moses has set down the story of in Numbers 16:49, “wherein there died fourteen thousand and seven hundred.” So soon as “the plague was begun,” as we read in verses 46–48, Aaron (the true type of our only High Priest and effectual Intercessor for us unto God) went with his incense and “stood between the dead and the living, and made an atonement for the people, and so the plague was

stayed.” How fearful a pestilence would that have been if it had continued any time, if it had not been presently stayed! And the sin that provoked God to send this pestilence among His people we find to have been their murmuring and rebelling against Moses and Aaron, the ministers and servants of the Lord, as it is plain by the forty-first and forty-second verses of that chapter.

The fourth memorable pestilence that we read of is that which is recorded in Numbers 25, of which “there fell in one day,” as the apostle says in 1 Corinthians 10:8, “three and twenty thousand.” Moses in setting down that story says in Numbers 25:9, “Those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand,” putting all together in that sum that perished at that time and for that sin, as well those whom himself and the judges had put to death according to the commandment of God in verses 4 and 5 (which may seem to have been in number about a thousand) as those that perished by that plague which the Lord in His fierce anger (as it is said in verse 4) did send among them, which were the three and twenty thousand that the apostle speaks of. For that most of them that then perished died of an extraordinary pestilence (and not all by the sword of the magistrate, as some learned men judge) may appear by that which the Holy Ghost speaks of in other places, as Numbers 31:16, “There was a plague among the congregation of the LORD”; and Joshua 22:17, where the very same words are used by Phinehas, who had a chief hand in the staying of it; and in Psalm 106:29–30: “The plague brake in upon them, then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment, and so the plague was stayed.” And what was the cause of this strange and fearful pestilence that consumed in one day three and twenty thousand? Surely, it was whoredom, as both Moses (Num. 25:1, 6) and the apostle (1 Cor. 10:8) do expressly teach us.

The fifth and last plague we read of in Holy Scripture was in David's time, the story whereof is set down in 2 Samuel 24:15. This went through all Israel "from Dan even to Beer-sheba" in three days and consumed in so short a time no less than "seventy thousand men." And the cause of this plague was the pride of David's heart and the confidence he reposed in his own strength and in the outward means he had to defend himself by and to provide for his own safety.

And besides these five great plagues, I find also mention made of another dangerous and strange sickness wherewithal the Lord in His just judgment did smite and afflict His people in the church of Corinth, which, though I cannot certainly say it was the pestilence (because the text does not expressly say so), yet I may boldly say it was an epidemical disease, and grievous mortality most likely to be it. "Many are weak and sick among you," says the apostle in 1 Corinthians 11:30, "and many sleep"—that is, die of it. And the cause of this sickness and mortality the apostle tells us was this, that they came carelessly, irreverently, and without due preparation unto the Holy Sacrament.

Thus, you see what sins have brought the plague upon men in former times, yea, upon such as have been God's people by profession as well as we. And, this "happened unto them for example," as the apostle speaks (1 Cor. 10:11), and all these examples are written and recorded in Scripture of purpose for our admonition.

And although we read of no plagues that are recorded in the Holy Scriptures but those I have mentioned and for those sins, yet find we divers other sins also which God has threatened to punish this way. God's people were afraid that He would "fall upon them, and consume them with the pestilence" (as we read in Exodus 5:3), even for their negligence of His solemn worship and service, though they were then in Egypt where they could not perform it without extreme

danger. And because Pharaoh had despised and hardened his heart against former and smaller judgments, the Lord threatens “to smite him and his people with the pestilence” (9:15). To conclude, the Lord did by His prophet threaten in anger and fury and in great wrath “to smite the inhabitants of Jerusalem, both man and beast, and that they should die of a very great pestilence” (Jer. 21:5–6), because they stood out in rebellion against the king of Babylon and refused to yield unto him as God had commanded them, whereby it appears that an obstinate refusing to obey the word and commandment of God in anything, though it may be such as may be colored with his best pretenses, will provoke Him to punish men this way.

The Applications

So then, to apply all this unto ourselves, seeing it is evident that we and our nation are guilty of all these sins, for every one of which we find in the Word that God has brought and threatened to bring this judgment upon His people in former times. Seeing we have been (1) most unthankful unto God for our deliverance out of that spiritual Egypt¹⁰ and house of bondage wherein our forefathers lived and have shown too much desire to return thither again and have loathed so long the heavenly food of the gospel of Christ more than ever they did that manna. And (2) have brought up and entertained a most slanderous and evil report of the Promised Land and of that strait way that leads unto it, speaking evil of and scorning the life and power of godliness and discouraging others from it, murmuring against and hating (to the death) such of God’s servants as either by doctrine or example do press and provoke us unto it. And (3) are so ready (upon every occasion) to

10. The Church of Rome at the time of the Reformation.

murmur and rebel against the servants and ministers of the Lord—content, indeed, to give them the hearing, but apt to tell them (if they shall deal particularly and roundly with us and require obedience to the truth and practice of that we hear and profess) that they take too much upon them. Seeing (4) whoredom does everywhere so increase and abound in our land, and (5) we are every whit as proud of our own strength and as apt to put trust in the arm of flesh as David was. And (6) the Holy Sacrament is in all places commonly profaned, and those holy things given to and received (without difference) by such dogs and swine as have no care at all duly to prepare themselves thereunto. Seeing (7) the public and solemn worship of God is everywhere so much neglected. And (8) we have so hardened our hearts against and profited so little by many other judgments whereby the Lord has witnessed His wrath from heaven against us and sought to bring us unto repentance. And (9) we do continually (with so great obstinacy) refuse to yield obedience to many of the express commandments of God.

Seeing, I say, we are guilty of all these sins that are the proper causes of this judgment, let us therefore impute this fearful plague whereby God has smitten the chief city [London] and many other parts of our land unto these our sins and justify the Lord in this judgment, the causes whereof are so evidently to be found among us. Yea, let us all fear that He will execute His fierce wrath upon us in the same manner, except we repent us of and forsake these sins. And this is the first way whereby we must make right use unto ourselves of this heavy judgment of God that is upon the land.

The second is this, that seeing the Lord does thus declare and proclaim that His anger and fury is kindled and inflamed against us all, it behooves us (without delay) by all means to make our peace with God and to seek reconciliation with

Him. "Acquaint thyself now with him," says Eliphaz to Job in Job 22:21, "and make peace with him: thereby good shall come unto thee." This and this only is the way unto true safety and comfort. And mark that he advises him to do it now. Now is the time to do it, if ever we will do it, now that His hand is so stretched out against us. And we are strangely hardened in our sins, if (howsoever we have wretchedly neglected it hitherto) we will do it now. If any shall ask me, "What must I do, and what course must I take to make my peace with God?" I answer briefly and plainly that there be three things you must do, if you would obtain peace with God. And if you can do these three things, you need not doubt to obtain it:

You must freely and fully and particularly confess your sins unto God, even those sins which I have shown to be the chief causes of this judgment. "I said," says David, "I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Ps. 32:5).

You must unfeignedly and fully resolve with yourself to cast off and forsake these and all other of your sins: "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy" (Prov. 28:13). Though you cannot quite leave them (as who can do that in this life?), yet if you can unfeignedly and without dissimulation desire and purpose and resolve with yourself to leave them all, begging strength of God that you may be made able to do it, then have you forsaken them in God's account, and they shall not hinder your peace and reconciliation with God. In this, David took comfort: "I am purposed," says he in Psalm 17:3, "that my mouth shall not transgress"; and in Psalm 39:1, "I said"—"I fully resolved and determined with myself"—"I will take heed to my ways."

And lastly, you must strive by a lively faith to lay hold on God's mercy in Christ and to get His blood sprinkled upon your heart. Christ is our peace, as the apostle calls Him in

Ephesians 2:14. Neither can we with all we are able to do make our peace with God, but only through faith in Him. When the destroying angel saw the blood of the lamb sprinkled upon the lintel and side posts of any door, he passed by that house and smote none in it (Ex. 12:23).

The third way whereby we must make right use to ourselves of this judgment we see upon others is this: it must increase our care to reform not ourselves only but our families. It is a vain thing for any man to bless himself or take comfort in his repentance without this care. Say not, "If I use all good means to make peace with God for myself, I hope the faults of my family shall never be imputed unto me." Search the Scriptures, and you shall find there was never any man that was himself reconciled and at peace with God, but his care was that his family might fear God and be in favor with Him, as well as himself. Cornelius, though he were a centurion and kept a great family and had soldiers to serve him, yet "feared God with all his house" (Acts 10:2). So soon as Zacchaeus himself was become a "son of Abraham," a true believer, salvation came unto his house too (Luke 19:9). Christ promised he should have a faithful and a religious family. So speaks Eliphaz also to Job, in Job 22:23: "If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles." No man that is himself truly returned unto the Almighty need to be discouraged in this. If he do his endeavor, God has promised that he shall be able (through His gracious assistance and blessing) to reform his family—though not to convert the heart of everyone in it, yet to keep them from open and scandalous offenses. Certainly, we do not make the right use we ought of this heavy scourge of God, unless we be made thereby more careful to reform our families. For this cause the Lord said He would not conceal from Abraham His purpose against the Sodomites, because He knew that he

would make this use of it. “For I know him,” says the Lord in Genesis 18:19, “that he will command his children, and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the LORD to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.” (1) Abraham (upon the knowledge and observation of God’s wrath even upon the Sodomites) would become more careful to look to his whole family and to reform it. (2) God would assist and bless him in this his endeavor, and he should see the fruit of it in his family. (3) This care that Abraham had of his family should be a principal means to make good unto him all God’s promises, to bring upon him and make sure unto him all the blessings and good things that God had promised unto him; and without this he could have had no assurance of them.

O that we could once believe and take to heart these things. Certainly, one main cause of this and all other judgments that are upon our land is the want of care that is in them that profess themselves to be the people of God in reforming their families—whether they of their family be drunkards or sober persons, blasphemers or such as fear an oath, unclean or chaste, profane or religious, [it] is all one to them.

The fourth and last way whereby we must make right use to ourselves of this judgment is this: it must make us more merciful to them that are in distress and more ready to relieve them. Nothing will give us more assurance to be freed from the plague ourselves or to find comfort and strength in it, if God shall please to visit us by it, than this. When God’s heavy hand did hang over Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel speaks thus unto him in Daniel 4:27: “Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy unto the poor; if it may be a lengthening to thy tranquility.” As if he should have said, “If anything will lengthen your tranquility and keep off the

judgment threatened, this is likely to do it.” Remember what our blessed Savior has said of this in Matthew 5:7: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” Nothing will give a man more assurance to find mercy with God in the time of his distress than this will. Remember also what His holy apostle says of this in James 2:13: “He shall have judgment without mercy, that shewed no mercy.” If either the plague or any other judgment seize upon that man that has been void of mercy, he shall have no comfort of God’s mercy in it. “And mercy rejoiceth”—or, boasts—“against judgment.” The merciful man shall not fear this or any other judgment before it comes, as other men do. And if it do light upon him, he shall rejoice and find a comfortable sense of God’s mercy in it. And remember this at this time especially, now you have kept a day of humbling yourselves before God. Know that there is nothing that will more grace our solemn services before God (especially services of this kind), nothing will make them more acceptable unto Him than when we shall therein manifest and declare ourselves to be merciful and bountiful unto the poor. “Is this not the fast that I have chosen?” says the Lord in Isaiah 58:6–7, “to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thine house? When thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?”

SERMON 2

August 17, 1625

Note 2 follows, the duty whereby David expressed his love and compassion to these men—he prayed for them. For though this be not expressed in the first part of the verse where the duty is mentioned that he performed toward these men in their misery, yet is it evident (1) by the express words of the last clause of the verse, where he mentions the success he had in the duty he performed for them, and (2) by this also, that he says he fasted and humbled his soul for them. For in all fasts and exercises of humiliation that God’s people have kept prayer was the chief duty they performed; and all other things they did in those exercises, they did only to help and further themselves in prayer, “to make their voice to be heard on high” (Isa. 58:[4]) and to make “them cry more mightily unto God” (Jonah 3:8). The doctrine then that we are to learn from this example of David is this:

DOCTRINE 2. That a chief duty we are to perform unto them that are in misery is to pray for them.

The Proof

See the proof of the point in five degrees:

This is a chief duty whereby we do express the truth of our love unto any and whereby we may do them good. When our

Savior had commanded us to “love our enemies, and to do good to them that hate us” in Matthew 5:44, He adds, “And pray for them.”

This is a duty that is to be performed by us toward all men (1 Tim. 2:1). Yea, even toward the wickedest men that live upon earth. See how importunate Abraham was with God for the beastly Sodomites in Genesis 18:32.

This duty is to be performed especially for such as are God’s people, though it be but in outward profession. This course Moses took to relieve Israel in a great extremity. When God threatened He would destroy Israel, “Moses stood before him in the breach,” by main force to keep Him out, to “turn away his wrath” (Ps. 106:23). How stood he in the breach? How did he turn away God’s wrath from them? By prayer. “Moses besought the LORD his God” (Ex. 32:11). This course David took to relieve God’s people in the time of a fearful pestilence that in a short time had consumed seventy thousand (2 Sam. 24:15). He was deeply affected with their misery, as appears by the story, but what course took he to help them? He prayed for them and so stayed the plague (1 Chron. 21:16–18). So did Moses in the very like case of the pestilence. “When wrath was gone out from the LORD,” and “the plague was begun,” he charged Aaron to “take his censer, and put fire therein from the altar, and put incense on it, and go quickly to the congregation, to make an atonement for them” (Num. 16:46). True it is, that signified the intercession of Christ for the people, which indeed is that that did the deed. But know (1) that when incense was offered, God’s people also prayed (Luke 1:10). And (2) that Christ’s intercession goes with our prayers also and is that that makes them effectual. “He offereth his incense with the prayers of all saints” (Rev. 8:3).

In strange and extraordinary judgments that are upon God’s people, we are bound not only to pray for them, but

to do it in an extraordinary manner. When the decree was sealed for the destruction of all the Jews, and Esther resolved to venture her life for the revoking of it, then ordinary prayer would not serve the turn; but Esther commanded extraordinary prayer to be used in such a case, and that for sundry days together. “Go fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night nor day” (Est. 4:16).

In public and general calamities that are upon God’s people or hang over them, public and general prayers should be used for them. This course Jehoshaphat took in that case in 2 Chronicles 20:13. “All Judah stood before the LORD” in that fast. And so did the Ninevites likewise in Jonah 3:5: “They proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them.” And the more public and solemn the prayers are that are made in this case, the more pleasing they are unto the Lord. This appears in Judges 20:26. They had before gone up to the house of God (v. 18); they had gone up the second time to seek the Lord and then did weep also before the Lord (v. 23), but prevailed not. The third time they prevailed. Why? What did they more now than they did before? (1) They fasted. (2) “All the children of Israel, and all the people went up.” An evident proof of this, that when God’s judgments are public and general upon God’s people, our prayers and humiliations should be as public and general as is possible; and the more public, the more pleasing unto God.

The Reasons

First, the Lord is He that both lays the judgment upon any of our brethren and He that must take it off, and therefore the best way we have to help them is to seek to Him in their behalf. It is the Lord that sends the pestilence: “I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt,” says the Lord in Amos 4:10. And it is He, and He only, that moderates and sets

bounds unto it. He says to it as to the sea, “Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed” (Job 38:11). He has set down in His counsel and decree whom it shall smite and whom it shall spare. The just number He has appointed shall die of it, use they what means they can (which they are bound to do, because this is a secret unto them) to avoid it. “Such as are for death”—that is, for the pestilence, as it is expounded in Jeremiah 21:7—“to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as for the captivity, to the captivity” (Jer. 15:2). And it shall not touch any of them whom He will have to be spared, though they live in never so much danger. “A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee” (Ps. 91:7). And it is the Lord only that removes it when He pleases, that says to the destroying angel, “It is enough, stay now thy hand” (2 Sam. 24:16). And lastly, it is He only that can cure those that are smitten with it. “The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and brings up again” (1 Sam. 2:6). So that, to conclude this reason, we may say with the prophet Amos, “Shall there be evil in the city, and the LORD hath not done it?” (Amos 3:6). The plague is in the city, and that is one great evil. Secondly, it increases there wonderfully¹—that is another evil. Thirdly, the people in the outlying parishes will not be restrained nor kept in—that is another evil. Fourthly, many perish with famine—that is another evil. And has not the Lord done all this? What better course then can we take for their good than to seek the Lord for them?

Secondly, the Lord has commanded us to do this. He desires and looks for this at our hands and is highly pleased with it when we, seeing His judgments upon our brethren, become suitors to Him in their behalf. He has commanded,

1. *Wonderfully*: remarkably.

“Before all things, let supplications,” etc., “be made for all men” (1 Tim. 2:1). Yea, He desires it greatly and looks for it even when He is most offended with a people to be thus sought unto in their behalf. See Ezekiel 22:30: “I sought for a man amongst them that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it.” And Isaiah 59:16: He “wondered that there was no intercessor.” Yea, He is highly pleased with this, in which respect Jeremiah desires God to take notice of this grace in him and remember it: “Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them” (Jer. 18:20). So that it is a sin against God to neglect this duty unto our brethren. “God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you” (1 Sam. 12:23).

Thirdly, the force and efficacy that there is in the prayers of God’s people to help and relieve them that are in misery is very great. The prayers of God’s people have prevailed wonderfully with Him, even for wicked men. How oft did Moses’s prayer remove God’s plagues even from Pharaoh (Ex. 8:13, 31; 9:33; 10:18–19). When Ahab and his land were almost consumed with a drought and famine, Elijah’s prayer delivered him from that judgment and brought rain; yet he was “a man subject to the like passions that we are” (James 5:17–18). Yea, in this very judgment of the pestilence, you shall see the force of prayer. For when God has drawn out this terrible sword of His in His fierce displeasure and consumed many by it and stretched out His arm to smite more, the prayers of God’s people have even stayed Him and held His hand and prevailed so with Him that they have even overcome Him and compelled Him to change His mind and put up His sword. When wrath was gone out from the Lord, and the plague was begun, Aaron stood with his incense “between the dead and the living, and the plague was stayed” (Num. 16:48). When God had said unto

Moses (against Israel for their idolatry) in Exodus 32:10, “Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them,” upon Moses’s prayer in verse 14, “The LORD repented him of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.” The like He did upon David’s prayer in 2 Samuel 24:16: “The LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough; stay now thine hand.” Is it in the power of man to overcome God, to withstand Him when He comes to take vengeance, to cause Him to change His mind? Yea, verily. Jacob had that power in Genesis 32:26, when the Lord had wrestled with him and said, “Let me go”—he would not let Him go, but “as a prince he had power with God, and prevailed” (v. 28). And how did he overcome God thus? By prayer, as you may see in Hosea 12:4: “He had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto him.” Say not, those were rare men; for all God’s people have this name given them. They are called “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16), and therefore as princes may prevail with God this way. And no marvel, though God’s people may thus prevail with God for the staying of His hand in temporal judgments or removing of them from their brethren, seeing they are able to prevail with God even for the pardon of their sins, which are the causes of those judgments, and for the converting and saving of their souls: “The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (James 5:15). And, “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death” (1 John 5:16).

The Uses

The use this doctrine serves unto is for (1) instruction, (2) reproof, (3) examination.

The Instruction

First, for instruction: to teach us what account is to be made of such as are true Israelites. And know you have two reasons to move you to make much of such.

They are a blessing to the place where they live: “Israel shall be a blessing in the midst of the land” (Isa. 19:24).

They are able as princes to prevail mightily with God by their prayers, to stand in the breach and to hold God’s hands. They are “the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof,” as they are called in 2 Kings 13:14. Indeed, there are but a few such true Israelites, which makes the prophet speak in that manner in Psalm 25:12: “What man is he that feareth the LORD?” But where you know such, make much of them. Why should not God’s favorites be as much honored as the favorites of the greatest king? Get as many such into the town you live in as you can. They are as Lots in Sodom (Gen. 19:22)—till Lot was gone out of Sodom, the angel could not destroy it. Get as many such into your family as you can—as David professed he would do in Psalm 101:6: “Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me.” And in Genesis 39:5, “The LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake.” Get such friends as these are. “I am a companion of them that fear thee” (Ps. 119:63); and, in verse 79, “Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.” I tell you, Paul, as great an apostle as he was, knew how to esteem and make much use of such friends: “Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me” (Rom. 15:30).

I know I shall offend many of you in speaking so much for such whom (above all others) you detest most and are ready

to show it upon every occasion.² And I have wondered much to see the bitter hatred that many who are otherwise civil men bear to such as fear God. For think I, “What hath the righteous done?” (Ps. 11:3). But I have found in God’s Book the true cause of it, and that is this, that every natural man hates God and is an enemy to Him (Rom. 5:10), and that God has put “enmity between the seed of the serpent, and the seed of the woman” (Gen. 3:15). And therefore, so long as you continue an enemy unto God and one of the serpent’s seed, you must needs hate all such as truly fear God. The good Lord be merciful to you and give you a heart to take notice of your wretched estate, that you may repent and come out of it.

The Reproof

The second use is for reproof of three sorts of men: (1) of them that cannot pray, (2) of them that do not use to pray,³ (3) of them that will not pray.

First, of them that cannot pray. O consider how miserable a man you are. First, you want that whereby you should help your poor brethren in their misery. A grief it is to an honest mind to see his brother in extreme want and misery, and he has nothing to relieve him with. Therefore is that commandment given in Ephesians 4:28, “Let him labor in some honest calling, that he may have to give.” How much more just cause of grief is this, when you cannot so much as pray for him? Secondly, you want that whereby you should keep off God’s judgments from yourself or remove them or yield you comfort in them. “For my love they were mine adversaries,” says David in Psalm 109:4, “but I gave myself unto prayer.” That was his

2. Many unbelievers who would not normally attend the midweek lectures were evidently present at the fast. Hildersham is addressing them here.

3. Those that are not in the habit of praying.

chief comfort in all his afflictions. Thirdly, you want that which should give you comfort in your present estate. For you can have no assurance that you are God's child or that you have any truth of grace in you, if you cannot pray. The Spirit of grace is the Spirit "of supplication" (Zech. 12:10). "Because ye are sons," says the apostle Paul in Galatians 4:6, "God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father." No man is the child of God nor has the Spirit of Christ in him that is not able feelingly and fervently to call God Father and to pray unto Him. Learn therefore to cry earnestly unto God as the disciples did in Luke 11:1: "Lord, teach me to pray."

The second sort that are to be reprov'd by this doctrine are such as can but (through laziness and profane negligence) do not use to pray. Many there be that seldom or never pray. It may be in their sickness or extreme danger they will, but they bear upon them that brand of an hypocrite that Job speaks of in Job 27:10, "Will he call upon God at all times?"—that is, constantly, and not by fits and starts only. Many that did once use constantly to pray with their families and in secret have now given it over. To whom the Lord will one day say, as in Isaiah 43:22, "Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob, but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel." They that neglect their calling upon God and are weary of prayer are weary of God. Many never poured out prayer to God for our armies⁴ nor for our brethren visited with the plague. The most of us have neglected it too long to seek to God for them in this extraordinary manner. "Go quickly with thy censer, the plague is begun," says Moses to Aaron in Numbers 16:46. So soon as the plague did begin, we should without delay have implored the Lord for our brethren. Unto these will I say but

4. English soldiers were fighting with Protestant forces in Europe in the 1620s.

two words. (1) That God may justly impute to you the blood both of our soldiers that died so miserably and of the many thousands that have perished by the plague, because you have not striven by your prayers with God for them. According to that rule of our Savior in Mark 3:4—he that uses not means to save life when it lies in his power is a murderer. (2) That this neglecting of prayer is a dangerous sign that you have no fear of God in you. “Thou casteth off fear,” says Eliphaz in Job 15:4, “and restrainest prayer before God.” It is a sign you believe not God’s providence. “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God,” says the prophet in Psalm 14:1. And one argument to prove this he gives in verse 4: “They call not upon the LORD.” Lastly, this is a sign that you have no comfort at all in God nor assurance of His favor. “Will the hypocrite,” says Job, in Job 27:10, “delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?” The cause why men keep not a constant course in prayer is because they have no delight nor comfort in God. O let us therefore make conscience of this duty to pray, and to pray constantly—praying always, as the apostle Paul requires in Ephesians 6:18, and 1 Thessalonians 5:16, “Pray without ceasing,” not giving over so good and necessary a duty, when we have once begun to take it up.

The third sort of them whom this doctrine reproves are such as (through profaneness or worldliness) will not pray. Though [1] the state have first enjoined us to keep these days of humiliation and (2) gone before us in it themselves and (3) published for our help a book of prayers, as ample, holy, effectual, and fit for the present occasion as ever were in any liturgy that I have seen⁵ (for all which we are greatly bound to praise the Lord); yet will they not upon these days lend their

5. *A Form of Common Prayer, Together with an Order of Fasting* was issued by the authorities in 1625 to be used at the fast.

help to their distressed brethren nor join with us in prayer for them. These men certainly are of the mind either of those profane worldlings that say, as in Job 21:15, “What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?” “Can we get in our harvest or provide for our families by coming to church and joining with you in prayer? Or will our praying keep away the plague from us?” Or else they are of the mind of those desperate atheists that said in Isaiah 22:13, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die.” “This plague increases strangely and is like enough to reach unto us. Let us therefore while we live be merry and make as much of ourselves as we can.” I grant every man is not fit to keep a fast every week, especially in this time of harvest, and neither did the state intend to enjoin him to do it. But not to join with God’s people sometimes in this duty, especially on these solemn days of humiliation, is, first, a great sin against our distressed brethren for whom our prayers would the more prevail the more general they were and the more of us did join together in them, as I have proved before out of 2 Chronicles 20:13. Secondly, a matter of great danger to themselves, as that which will provoke God’s displeasure against them. “Whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day” that the congregation kept their fast on, “he shall be cut off from among his people” (Lev. 23:29). In which respect God commanded them to keep it “in all their dwellings” (Lev. 23:3). And in Zephaniah 1:6, the Lord threatens to stretch out His hand against and to cut off them “that have not sought the LORD”—then, much more such as refuse to do it, being thus called and provoked thereunto.

The Examination

The third and last use is for examination whether our prayers heretofore have been—or now be such—so powerful and effectual as have been described in this doctrine, whether we

be such Israelites as (like princes) have prevailed with God in them. God's children should inquire after their prayers how they speed. David prays oft for an answer in Psalm 143:1, "In thy faithfulness answer me," and protests it would be a death to him to find God silent to his prayers in Psalm 28:1. And what answer has God given to our prayers? First, we have prayed for the good success of our armies against the enemies of the gospel.⁶ But the enemy still prevailed, so that we may complain as in Psalm 44:9–12, "Thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies; thou makest us turn back from the enemy; and they which hate us spoil for themselves, thou sellest thy people for naught, and dost not increase thy wealth by their price." Secondly, we have prayed for the good success of our parliament, that the king and nobles and [House of] Commons might agree together as one man for the settling of God's ark and religion among us, as they did in Solomon's time (1 Kings 8:1).⁷ But the parliament for all our prayers has received such an end as every good heart has cause to lament. Thirdly, we have prayed unto God to stay His hand in the noisome pestilence. When Aaron stood with his incense between the living and the dead, the plague ceased (Num. 16:48), and David's prayer stayed the plague ([1] Chron. 21:17–18). Our David and our Aarons and the whole land have oft prayed against this judgment, and ever since we began to pray, the plague has increased wonderfully. So that we may complain with the church in Lamentations 3:8, "When I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer." And with Psalm 80:4, "O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry

6. Protestant armies were suffering defeat and setbacks across the continent of Europe in the 1620s.

7. The 1625 parliament, otherwise known as the "useless" parliament, was short-lived and achieved little of any consequence. It was dissolved by the king on August 12, 1625.

against the prayer of thy people?” What is the cause of this? I answer, surely (though there may be other causes, yet this is the chief), we have asked, and have not received, because we have asked amiss (James 4:3). And that we may the better discern what has been amiss in our prayers, I will show you how those prayers should be qualified that should prevail with God.

First, we must pray fervently and importunately, as they that will receive no “nay” in their suits. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man,” says the apostle in James 5:16, “availeth much.” The prayer of the most righteous man that is cannot be effectual nor avail much, unless it be fervent. And to such prayer only is the promise made in Jeremiah 29:13: “Ye shall seek for me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” The want of this fervency in prayer the prophet complains of, as of the chief cause why God did hide His face from His people and consumed them with His judgments, in Isaiah 64:7: “There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee.” By prayer, the faithful may, as it were, take hold of God. They may hold His hands from striking them, as Moses did when God said to him, “Let me alone” (Ex. 32:10). But none does thus effectually call upon God and take hold of Him that prays coldly and drowsily, but he only “that stirreth up” and rouses himself unto this duty, that he may do it fervently. And surely this may be one cause why God has given no better answer to our prayers hitherto, because He sees how cold and drowsy we have been in them, how little affected we have been with the miseries of our brethren whom we have seemed to pray for. When our blessed Savior was in His agony and His soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death in Matthew 26:38, His disciples Peter and James and John, whom He desired to watch with Him and to be some help to Him in that His distress, fell asleep—so little sense had they of His extreme misery in

Matthew 26:40. And even so have we carried ourselves toward our brethren, the members of Christ. We have pretended a willingness to yield them our help in the miseries they are in, but, alas, in the prayers that we have seemed to make for them we have been overtaken with drowsiness and sleepiness. We have been in them little or nothing at all touched with the sense of their distress. But as our Savior said then unto those His disciples in Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray," so say I unto you. Beloved, you can never do yourselves or your brethren good by your prayers, unless when you pray you watch and look well to your hearts to keep them from drowsiness and senselessness, from wandering and roving, that when you pray, you may pray with fervency and feeling of your own necessities and of the necessities of them that you do pray for. Let us not think that (because we see no better fruit of our prayers) the Lord has been displeased with us for keeping these fasts and presuming to become suitors to Him for our brethren. But let us rather judge that He has therefore delayed to answer us hitherto, that He might cause us hereby to cry louder and to be more importunate and fervent with Him in our prayers. For so dealt He with the good woman of Canaan, in Matthew 15:22, 24, 26. He did not only delay to help her, but by His neglecting of her and the rough answers He gave her seemed angry with her and willing to discourage her, not out of any dislike He had to her or her suit (wherewith doubtless He was much pleased), but only to increase her fervency and importunity in prayer.

Secondly, we must pray in faith and confidence to be heard. "Let him ask in faith," says the apostle in James 1:6-7, "else let him not think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." And surely we have just cause to pray in faith and confidence that we shall prevail with God in these prayers that we

make for our distressed brethren. Many good grounds of confidence we have:

We have heard that it is the will and commandment of God that we should pray for them. “And this is the confidence that we have in him,” says the apostle in 1 John 5:14, “that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.”

These extraordinary prayers and fasts that we keep are enjoined us by public authority of our gracious sovereign and of the state. And even that is a thing highly pleasing unto God and will much further the success of our prayers. Therefore, also it is mentioned by the Holy Ghost as a matter of no small importance in two of the most successful fasts—that is, in that of Judah, in 2 Chronicles 20:3, “Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah”; and in that of the Ninevites in Jonah 3:7, “He caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying,” etc.

These fasts are kept generally and everywhere throughout the land, and that is also a thing that God is much pleased with. Such prayers and days of humiliation that have been so universal have been wont much to prevail with God, as we have already heard out of Judges 20:26 and 2 Chronicles 20:3, 13 and Jonah 3:5, 7–8.

The nation and people that we pray for are God’s own people and such as bear His name. Admit our land be as sinful as Sodom was, yet remember that if there had been but ten such in Sodom as we have many thousands in our land, God had heard Abraham’s prayer even for Sodom because of them (Gen. 18:32). Of our land (blessed be God) we may yet say there is no nation in the world at this day that has so many righteous persons in it or that has the gospel preached in it in that sincerity and power as we have. Nay, there is no city in the world where the gospel is so plentifully and so faithfully

preached, nor wherein God is so purely worshipped, as in that city that we meet together this day to pray for.⁸ And what an encouragement that may be unto us in our prayers is plain by that speech of the prophet in his prayer unto God for Judah, in Jeremiah 14:9: “Yet thou, O LORD, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name, leave us not.”

And this must be acknowledged for another cause why our prayers hitherto have sped no better: we have not prayed in faith. Many have joined with us whose persons God never yet accepted or was well pleased with. And till God have respect to Abel himself, He will never have respect to any offering of his (Gen. 4:4). And such of us as are in the state of grace, yet have we not stirred up our faith and confidence to speed in the prayers we have made. Do it hereafter, and you shall be sure to speed the better in your prayers for it. Say unto your soul when you prepare yourself to pray, as David did in Psalm 42:11, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.” Put your confidence in God. Hope and expect to receive a gracious answer from Him when you pray unto Him, and you shall find better success in your prayers than you have been wont to do.

Thirdly, we must pray in sense of our own unworthiness. No man is fit to pray for God’s people, but he that feels “the plague of his own heart,” as Solomon speaks in 1 Kings 8:38.

“But how can that be,” will you say, “if I have when I pray a deep apprehension and sense of mine own unworthiness and sin, how can I be importunate with God in my prayer? How can I pray in faith or be confident that He will hear me? This must needs deprive a man of all boldness, discourage, and make him afraid to speak unto God.” This effect the sense of

8. England, and London in particular.

sin seems to have had in David, when he cried in Psalm 40:12, “Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head, therefore mine heart faileth me.”

But to this I answer that no faithful man has cause to fear this. For God’s people have never been so strong with Him in prayer as when they were most abased and dejected in themselves in sense of their own weakness and unworthiness. “When I am weak,” says the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:10, “weak and dejected in myself through sense of mine own infirmities and afflictions, then am I strong—strong in the Lord and fittest to do Him service in an acceptable manner.” See an example and type of this in Jacob in Genesis 32:25–26. Never was he so strong with God as when the hollow of his thigh was out of joint. “He had power over the angel”—over Christ, the Angel of the Covenant, says the prophet in Hosea 12:4—“and prevailed. He wept and made supplication unto him, he found him in Bethel.” Why wept he so? Certainly, from the sense of his own infirmity and unworthiness. But he prevailed with God in his supplications nevertheless, but much the more for that. See this also in the good woman of Canaan. Do you not think she was much abased in herself upon those three repulses that she had received in Matthew 15:27? Yet was her prayer then most strong and effectual with God—see verse 28. And this is surely another cause why our prayers for our brethren have been so weak and without force with God. We are too strong, too well persuaded of ourselves to do God’s people any good with our prayers.

Fourthly, we must bring with us unto prayer an unfeigned desire and a full purpose and resolution of heart to reform that which is amiss both in ourselves and others, and so remove the cause of God’s displeasure that is kindled against us. Certainly, this would give wonderful force unto our prayers. This was

that which gave such force unto the fasting and praying of the Ninevites in Jonah 3. See their care and desire: “Let them turn every one from his evil way,” say the king and his nobles in their proclamation (v. 8), “and the violence that is in their hands.” See also the performance of that they resolved to do, and how nothing so much prevailed with God for the success of their prayers as this: “God saw their works, that they turned from their evil ways, and God repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them, and he did it not” (v. 10). Therefore has it been usual with God’s people in their solemn fasts not only to make full and particular confession of their sins, but also to vow unto God that they would leave and forsake them. Yea, they were wont solemnly to bind themselves unto this. All this is evident in Nehemiah 9:12–38 and 10:29. “When Phinehas stood up and executed judgment” upon Zimri and Cozbi, as Moses and the judges had before done of many others that were joined unto Baal-Peor in Numbers 25:4–5, and so removed the cause of God’s displeasure, “the plague was stayed,” says the prophet in Psalm 106:30. All the “weeping of the whole congregation before the door of the tabernacle” of which we read in Numbers 25:6 could do nothing without that. O that God would put into the hearts of all our magistrates not only to appoint and keep solemn and general fasts but also (by severe execution of the laws) to remove the causes of all our plagues. Our king and state (blessed be God) have made good laws against idolatry, swearing, profanation of the Sabbath, murder, and drunkenness, but (alas) we want such as Phinehas to see the laws executed upon any of these offenders. And therefore it is no marvel though the plague be not stayed. While these foul sins are winked at and go unpunished, what hope can we have that either our own prayers or the prayers of all the saints upon earth should prevail with God for our land. Till the Achans be found out and punished—as found

they may easily be, for “they do everywhere declare their sin as Sodom”; they hide it not, as the prophet speaks in Isaiah 3:9— but till they be punished, as God did say to Joshua in Joshua 7:10–11, “Get thee up, wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned,” so will He to us: “Why do you thus fast and pray and make such show of humiliation as you do? Find out the sins and punish them that are the causes of Mine anger, and then I will be appeased toward you and your land.”

Certainly, one chief cause why our fasting and praying has done so little good is because this has not been done. Nay, many of these lewd men that are guilty of these foul sins intrude themselves into our assemblies and join with us in these holy duties. And we know that “the sacrifice of the wicked is abomination unto the LORD” (Prov. 15:8). Let me therefore exhort you, beloved, [1] that as you desire to please God in this profession of humiliation that you make and to benefit yourselves or your brethren by your prayers, resolve both to forsake every known sin and vow unto God this day amendment of life in such particulars as your own heart can tell you that has most offended God by (and which of us all is it that has not something to reform?), remembering always that speech of the prophet in Psalm 66:18: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me”; as also (2) to do what lies in you to reform others.

Fifthly and lastly, we must join works of mercy with our prayers. (1) Let no man think he shall be a loser by that which he gives (out of conscience toward God) unto the poor. “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD,” says the Holy Ghost in Proverbs 19:17, “and that which he hath given will he pay him again.” (2) Of all alms that is given, that which is best and most pleasing unto God is that which is given in our church assemblies; for it is an ordinance of God (and even a Sabbath duty) that collection should be made for the

poor when we meet together, as is plain by that speech of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:1–2.⁹ And of that which is thus given, you may have much more assurance that it shall be given to them only that have need, than you can have of much of that which you give at your doors.¹⁰ (3) There is great force in this work of mercy to further the good success of our prayers, else would not the angel have said thus to Cornelius in Acts 10:4, “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.” His alms deeds made his prayers more available¹¹ with God than otherwise they would have been.

9. Weekly collections for the poor were made at each lecture in Ashby during the fast.

10. I.e., to beggars. He is articulating the principle that it is better to channel charitable giving through the church.

11. *More available.* avail more.

SERMON 3

September 7, 1625

*T*he two first points observed in this verse we have already dispatched—that is, first, the time wherein he [David] showed his kindness unto them and the occasion he took to do it, “when they were sick”; and secondly, the duty and means whereby he expressed his kindness unto them. He prayed in an extraordinary manner for them. Now this extraordinary prayer he made for them is set forth (1) by the outward and bodily helps he used in this prayer; (2) by the inward disposition of his mind and heart in it. The outward and bodily helps he used in this his prayer were two: the clothing of himself with sackcloth and fasting. For the first of these, we shall find it was much used by God’s people in their extraordinary prayers. See Nehemiah 9:1, “The children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackcloth, and earth upon them”; and Jonah 3:5, “The people of Nineveh proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.” Yea, the Lord Himself sometimes commanded them to do so, as in Isaiah 22:12, “The Lord GOD of hosts called them to girding with sackcloth”; and Joel 1:13, “Lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God.” And lest you should from hence conceive that we also are now bound to use it, you must understand, first, that in those days it was neither enjoined

nor used as a religious ceremony appropriated to this part of God's worship, but as a civil sign whereby men were wont to testify their sorrow, as wearing black is now among us. So in that mourning for Abner (wherein there was no prayer or religious duty performed) David commanded in 2 Samuel 3:31, "Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner." So Hezekiah and his nobles, upon the hearing of Rabshakeh's blasphemy to testify their sorrow (though they kept no fast then), "covered themselves with sackcloth" in 2 Kings [1]9:1–2. Yea, Benhadad's servants (though they knew not what extraordinary prayer meant), when they were to sue to Ahab for mercy, to profess their sorrow and humility "put sackcloth on their loins, and ropes on their heads," in 1 Kings 20:32.

Objection. But how should it be so much used in this so solemn part of God's worship and enjoined also by the Lord, if it were merely a civil thing and no religious ceremony?

Answer. I answer, we are now enjoined in our church assemblies to wear such apparel as is comely, decent, and fit for our estate and condition. "I will," says the apostle Paul, speaking of the behavior of all God's people in the public assemblies, in 1 Timothy 2:9, "in like manner also that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety"—and yet is that no ecclesiastical ceremony, no matter of religion, but a thing merely civil.

Secondly, we must understand that in these civil things that might be decent and fit in one country (and consequently commanded of God), which in another country is utterly indecent and consequently forbidden. It was a great sin among the Corinthians for a woman to come into the congregation with her head uncovered—that is, without a veil to cover her whole head (1 Cor. 11:5). In our congregations (because it is

indecent), it were a sin for a woman to come so attired.¹ In which respect, although we have oft in the New Testament mention of fasts both public and private, of sackcloth used in them we have no mention at all.

Note 3. Now this being premised for the understanding of the words, the thing we have to observe in them for our instruction is this: that David in his extraordinary prayer used the outward and bodily exercises as helps to his prayer, and from this we have to learn what we should do in the like case—that is:

DOCTRINE 3. That in the days of our humiliation, besides fervent prayer and the inward afflicting of the soul, there are certain outward and bodily exercises to be used by God’s people.

The Helps

As in our ordinary prayers there be certain outward things [that] may help us much and consequently may not be neglected, as (1) fit time and place wherein we may be freed from distraction. Our blessed Savior Himself “in the morning before day, went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed,” as we read in Mark 1:35, and commands us in Matthew 6:6 to go into a closet to make our private prayers and to shut the door to us. And (2) fit gestures also, as kneeling when we can. “O come, let us worship and fall down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker,” says the prophet in Psalm 95:6, and standing up when we cannot conveniently kneel. The publican, though he were much humbled and dejected

1. Hildersham is speaking here about face veils rather than hats. In Roman Catholicism, women were often veiled, but many Puritans argued against the practice based on 2 Corinthians 3:13–18.

in himself, stood when he prayed even in the temple, as we read in Luke 18:13. For that also is a sign of reverence and humility. When Eglon heard Ehud say he had a message to him from God, he arose “out of his seat,” in Judges 3:20. So in our extraordinary prayers there be certain outward and bodily exercises that may help us much and are therefore not to be neglected by us. And those are of two sorts: some consist in doing and performing certain duties, and some in forbearing some such things as at other times we may use.

The Things to Do

Four things I find performed by God’s people at the times of their extraordinary prayers and days of humiliation, especially such as have been public and solemn.

First, the reading and preaching of the Word. Two notable examples we have for this. In Nehemiah 9:3, “They stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day.” And how did they read? That you shall find in Nehemiah 8:8. They “gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.” Yea, they applied it so effectually that it wrought marvelously upon the people’s hearts, as appears in verse 9. The other example is in Jeremiah 36:5–6: “Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I am shut up, I cannot go into the house of the LORD: therefore go thou, and read in the roll which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the LORD in the ears of the people, in the LORD’s house, upon the fasting day.” And why did they use this? Not so much for the enlightening and informing of the judgment, as (1) for to work upon the heart and further it in humiliation; for the word is powerful in that way—“Is not my word like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jer. 23:29). It is like Aaron’s rod, that is able to fetch water out of the rock, in Exodus 17:6. And (2) to quicken the heart to fervent prayer.

This reason Jeremiah gives why he would have preached to them on the day of their fast, and when he could not do that, would needs have Baruch read the Word to them: “It may be they will present their supplication before the LORD” (Jer. 36:7). This will stir them up to pray fervently.

Secondly, I find singing of the psalms used in a most public and solemn fast, in 2 Chronicles 20:19. For as there be psalms of all sorts, of mourning and lamentation as well as of thanksgiving, so is the exercise of singing them a singular means to stir up holy affections of all sorts. “Be ye filled with the Spirit: speaking to yourselves in psalms” (Eph. 5:18–19).

Thirdly, I find God’s people have used to join with their extraordinary prayers (as a means to make them the more effectual) alms deeds and giving to the poor, as in Acts 10:4, “Thy prayers and thine alms deeds are come up for a memorial before God.” And no marvel, for see what testimony our Savior gives unto this in Luke 11:41: “Give alms of such things as ye have, and behold all things are clean unto you.”

Fourthly and lastly, I find that in their solemn fasts they have been wont to examine and inquire what foul sins have been committed among them that might be the causes of God’s judgments, and to censure and reform them. This to have been the custom of God’s people may appear by the fast that was kept in Jezreel in 1 Kings 21:8–10. Jezebel wrote to the elders and nobles there to proclaim a fast (upon occasion pretended, as it seems, of some great judgment on the land or on that city, present or feared). In this fast, inquiry was made (as it may appear) what should be the cause of that judgment. Two false witnesses step up (suborned for the nonce²) and charge Naboth to be the cause of that judgment,

2. *Suborned for the nonce*: persuaded or bribed to perjure themselves for that occasion.

for he had blasphemed God and the king. And indeed of all things that can be done at a fast, this has been held by God's people the principal, and that would give more force to their prayers than anything else. See it in Ezra 10:1–3, and also in Nehemiah 9:2: "The seed of Israel," upon the day of their fast, "separated themselves from all strangers." And verse 38, they made a solemn covenant with God and bound themselves by an oath to walk in God's law, and to observe, and do all his commandments and that they would no more match³ with idolaters (10:29–30). Where this was not done (by those whom it concerned), where no care was taken to find out and amend those things that did provoke God to wrath, the prayers of the best men in the world could never prevail much with God. See a notable example of this in Joshua 7. A better man than Joshua could not pray; a more fervent and effectual prayer could no good man make than he did in Joshua 7:6–9. Yet the Lord was so far from hearkening to him that He checks him for it: "Get thee up, wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned" (vv. 10–11) and shall never stand before their enemies, till they have found out and purged themselves from this sin. As soon as Achan was found out and punished, Joshua's prayer was heard presently (8:1).

The Things to Avoid

I have shown you what these helps are to be used in our extraordinary prayers, which consist in doing and performing of certain duties. There are some other helps to be used which consist in forbearing and waining⁴ ourselves from some things upon that day which at other times we may lawfully use.

3. *Match*: marry.

4. Hildersham probably means "weaning," in the sense of becoming reconciled to doing something without an accustomed aid.

Therefore, the fast day is called a day of restraint in Joel 1:14 and Zechariah 7:3. The Jews say that on every fast that they had kept (four times a year during the whole time of their captivity—see Zechariah 8:19) they had “separated themselves.” Now the things we must forbear on the fast day are five in number.

First, all manner of food, all kind of meat and drink whatsoever. So in the fast that Esther enjoined they might “neither eat nor drink” while the fast lasted in Esther 4:16. And so in the fast of Nineveh in Jonah 3:7, “Let them taste nothing, let them not feed, nor drink water.” So of Ezra (in 10:6), it is said that on the fast day “he did eat no bread, nor drink water.”

Secondly, all costliness and neatness in our apparel and attire must be forborne on that day. See such examples for this are beyond all exception, even of great princes. In a private and domestical fast (I mean not a secret fast, of which our Savior says in Matthew 6:17, “When thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face”), it is said of David, in 2 Samuel 12:20, and of Esther in 5:1, that when their fast was ended, they “changed their apparel” and put on that which befitted their degree—which argues plainly that while their fast lasted they had forborne to wear it. And in a public fast we have the like example of the king of Nineveh in Jonah 3:6, “He laid his robe from him, and covered himself with sackcloth.” For as bravery, costliness, and neatness in apparel has great cause to puff up our flesh and make it proud, so the neglect of the costliness and neatness of our apparel (when it is voluntary) is a special means both to testify and increase the humiliation of the heart. So Mephibosheth showed his sorrow for David’s trouble in 2 Samuel 19:24: “He had neither trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day that the king departed, till he came again in peace.” So in Exodus 33:4, “When the people had heard those evil tidings” that God would not go with them

into Canaan, “they mourned, and no men did put on his ornaments.” And this they did by God’s express commandment, as appears in the next verse.

Thirdly, we must abstain (while the fast lasts) from delights of all sorts, from all means of joy and gladness, which at other times are most lawful. Even from the delight which is taken in the marriage bed (1 Cor. 7:5), even the newly married couple must do it (Joel 2:16), much more from music (Dan. 6:18) and from all recreations whatsoever. It is spoken of therefore as a foul sin in Isaiah 58:3, “Behold, in the day of your fasting ye find pleasure.”

Fourthly, we must also abstain from the works of our calling, not only servile (as on other holy days, see Leviticus 23:7–8, 21, 25, 35), but on the Sabbath and on the fast days all works are forbidden (16:29, and 23, 28, 31), and that upon no small penalty: “Whatsoever soul it be that doth any work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people” (23:30).

Fifthly and lastly, we must also upon the fast day make some abatement of our natural rest and sleep. See 2 Samuel 12:16, “David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth”; and Joel 1:13, “Lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God,” which it was not possible for them to do without some abatement of their ordinary rest and sleep. And the reason of this is evident, because as ordinary and much sleep is a great means of satisfaction and contentment to the body (“I said my bed shall comfort me,” says Job 7:13, “my couch shall ease my complaint”), so does the want of it afflict the body much, as appears also by Job’s complaint. “Wearisome nights are appointed to me,” says he in Job 7:3–4, “when I lie down, I say, when shall I arise, and the night be gone? And I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day.”

And this separation and restraint of ourselves from these four things must continue during the space of one whole day—that is, four and twenty hours. No fast we read of in Scripture continued for any less time. And we have express commandment we should keep it as a Sabbath, in Leviticus 16:31: “It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you.” Yea, in this very point we should keep it as a Sabbath: “It shall begin in the ninth day” of the seventh month “at even: from even unto even shall ye celebrate your sabbath” (Lev. 23:32). Now, before I proceed to give you the reasons why this abstinence and restraining of ourselves in these four things should be so necessary upon the day of our fast, I must give you certain cautions to prevent the mistaking of this doctrine.

The Cautions

First, that this outward abstinence is not the chief part of a true fast nor the chief help to our prayers. The inward humiliation of the soul is far more acceptable to God and has more force to make our prayers pierce the heavens than all this. “Bodily exercise profiteth little,” says the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 4:8, and such are all these four parts of abstinence that you have heard of. “But godliness”—whereof the inward afflicting of the soul and mortifying of our lusts is a chief part—“is profitable unto all things.” “Rend your hearts, and not your garments,” says the prophet in Joel 2:13. Nay, the restraining of ourselves in these four things is in itself no service of God nor acceptable at all unto Him, further than as it is a help to the inward humiliation of the heart and even animated by it. That which is said of the one of these may be fitly said of all: “That which goeth into the mouth defileth not a man” (Matt. 15:11), and “the kingdom of God” consists not in “meat or drink” (Rom. 14:17).

Secondly, that these outward signs and helps to humiliation must be increased according to the increase and urgency of the cause. As there be degrees in God's judgments on a land or family or person, some more general than other some, some more extreme than other some, seven times more grievous as the Lord speaks in Leviticus 26:24, and such as do more deeply affect the heart—so ought these outward signs and helps of our humiliation be proportional thereunto. Whereas ordinarily the fasts we read of lasted but a day (Lev. 23:32, "from even to even"; Judges 20:26, they "fasted that day until even"; 2 Samuel 1:12, they "mourned, and wept, and fasted until even"), the fast we read of in Esther 4:16 was kept three days and three nights together.

If any man shall ask me, does not that example bind us? I answer three things. (1) That we in these northern climates are not able to forbear meat so long as they in those countries were. Experience teaches us that the Spaniard and the Italian needs not meat so much as we. (2) We have not (blessed be God) the like occasion. That judgment was so extreme, general, presently imminent, as they might well hold out their fast so long with feeling and affection, which is the main thing to be looked unto in this case; and without hope and likelihood of that, the enjoining of the other were but gross hypocrisy, as is plain by that speech of our Savior in Matthew 15:7–8. (3) From that example we learn that though we cannot keep for so long a time without any intermission as they did yet when God shall increase the causes and occasions of our humiliation, we may and ought to increase and multiply our fasts in that manner as the men of Jabesh Gilead did in 1 Samuel 31:13. They "fasted seven days." Which also justifies this most Christian and religious decree of our king and state, enjoining (during this time of so great calamity) a general fast to be kept every week.

Thirdly, that this law of outward abstinence in the days of our humiliation must give place to the necessity of man—necessity (said I), yea, even unto decency and convenience also in some sort. Though we must on the fasting day abridge ourselves in our apparel, yet may we have respect to comeliness in our apparel even on that day. We may not disguise our bodies or make them ridiculous, as our Savior noted it to have been the fashion of the hypocrites to do. “They disfigure their faces,” says He in Matthew 6:16, “that they may appear unto men to fast.” It is required even of the minister and so likewise of other men to be κόσμιος, [meaning] comely and decent even that way (1 Tim. 3:2). So though we must for the whole day of our humiliation abstain from all food, yet such as cannot fast so long without evident danger (1) either of their health or (2) of making themselves unfit to perform the spiritual duties of the day may lawfully eat something upon the fast day. Two things will make this evident.

First, the rest of the Sabbath (which is as strictly enjoined as abstinence at a fast) yet might be lawfully broken for the preservation of a man’s life, as we see in Elijah’s travel (1 Kings 19:8), five or six Sabbaths together. Yea, for the preservation of the life of a beast (Luke 14:5); yea, for the preservation of the health of a beast (Luke 13:15). For God delights more in mercy than in any external works even of His own service (Matt. 12:7).

Secondly, this abstinence is enjoined but for a help to our prayers and other spiritual duties. When once it ceases to be a help and proves a hindrance to them, then it is of no worth with God. I grant that such as cannot thus abstain cannot keep a fast, but yet may they keep a day of humiliation in as acceptable and effectual a manner as they that can fast best. Provided (1) that they abuse not this liberty and pretend necessity when there is none, but remember that they have herein to deal with

God, who knows their heart. See 1 Thessalonians 2:4, Galatians 5:13: “Brethren, ye are called unto liberty, only use not your liberty as an occasion to the flesh.” (2) That that which they eat upon the day of humiliation be neither for quantity nor quality such but that they may still preserve in themselves such a feeling of the want of food as may afflict nature, as we see Daniel did, in Daniel 10:3: “I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine within my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.”

The Reasons

Now for the reasons and grounds of the doctrine why such bodily exercises (especially this abstinence) must be used upon the days of our humiliation, I need go no further than this, that God has ordained them in His Word, as you have heard. And therefore we may be assured (1) they are useful and profitable for us. For whatsoever He commands us to do is for our good (Deut. 10:13). (2) That He will make them effectual to His people unto those ends He has ordained them for. “Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,” says our Savior in Matthew 28:20, “and lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” And those ends are three principally.

First, to further and help forward the inward humiliation of the heart, to make us the better to feel what sin is and what it has deserved at God’s hands. For as the full feeding and pleasing of the body in these things is a means to increase corruption—“When I fed them to the full, then they committed adultery.... They were as fed horses in the morning,” etc. (Jer. 5:7–8)—so the abridging of it in these things is effectual to weaken and abate the strength of sin: “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1 Cor. 9:27). By this we take revenge of ourselves, which is a great

help unto true repentance, as the apostle Paul shows in 2 Corinthians 7:11.

Secondly, to further and help forward the fervency of our hearts in prayer. This is evident by that speech of Christ in Mark 9:29: “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.”

Thirdly, to profess and make outward protestation of our repentance and submission unto God and humble desire to be reconciled unto Him. And even this is highly pleasing unto God, as we may see in the example of Ahab in 1 Kings 21:29, “Because he humbleth himself before me, therefore I will not bring the evil in his days”; and of Rehoboam and his princes, “They have humbled themselves,” says the Lord in 2 Chronicles 12:7, “therefore I will not destroy them”; and verse 12, “When Rehoboam humbled himself, the wrath of the LORD turned from him”—and yet had these no truth of grace in them. In which respect (though [1] no man can please God in his fast nor find sound comfort to his soul in it, that is not in his heart troubled for his sin, does not unfeignedly repent, that cannot pray, that does not believe. “We know,” says the man that was born blind, in John 9:31, “that God heareth not sinners.” And “without faith it is impossible to please God,” says the apostle in Hebrews 11:6. [2] Though no man be fit to keep a private and voluntary fast that is a novice in religion and has not attained to some good measure of grace for fear of taking hurt and being made the worse by it, according to that speech of our Savior in Luke 5:36–37, “The new piece will make the rent greater, the new wine will burst the bottles.”)—yet, in public and general calamities they may be enjoined to keep a fast that have no such measure of grace in them, as we see in Joel 1:14, “Gather the elders, and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD,” and 2:16, “Gather the children, and those that suck the breasts.” Yea, it has greatly

furthered the efficacy of the prayers of God's own people, when in such a case all have come (tag and rag, as we say) to join with them in this service, as I noted to you the last day out of Judges 20:26.

Objection. If any man shall object [that] God will not hear hypocrites and wicked men, as in Job 27:9, "Will God hear his cry?" and, "If I regard iniquity in my heart," says David in Psalm 66:18, "the Lord will not hear me." *Answer.* I answer, it is true; such can have no assurance that God will hear them or respect their prayers because they have no promise. "Godliness hath the promises," says the apostle in 1 Timothy 4:8. All God's promises belong to the godly, and to them only. Yet for temporal blessings God has oft had respect to the cries even of such as have had no truth of grace, as is plain in Genesis 21:17, "God heard the voice of Ishmael," and Psalm 78:38, "Many a time"—upon their prayers whom he had described in verse 37—"turned he his anger away."

For (1) in this they were thus far no hypocrites, because they were heartily sensible of God's judgments and desired unfeignedly to be eased of them. Therefore is it said in 2 Chronicles 12:6, "The princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves." (2) This taking to heart of God's judgments and professing their humiliation and their yielding to the commandments of authority in this case (as in the days of the judges and Jehoshaphat we heard all the people did)—these, I say, were good things and remainders of God's image in them. In which the Holy Ghost says in 2 Chronicles 30:12, "In Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart, to do the commandment of the king and of the princes by the word of the LORD." And these remainders of His own image God loves wheresoever He sees them: "Jesus beholding him loved him" (Mark 10:21).

The Uses

The use this doctrine serves unto is:

First, for instruction to direct us how we should keep our fasts. Though this be a doctrinal point and not so fit perhaps to work upon our affections as some other might be and such as does also concern but the outside of a true fast, yet have I been the larger in it, because it may serve for a preparation to all the fasts we shall keep hereafter. And the fruit and success of our fasts depends on us performing of them in that manner God has appointed. Many that are willing to obey God in this duty may through ignorance fail in the right manner of performing it and so not only lose their labor but offend God further, as in 1 Chronicles 15:13, “The LORD our God,” said David, “made a breach upon us, because we sought him not in due order.” And though God has in our fasts a principal respect to our hearts (see 1 Samuel 16:7), yet looks He also for the service of our bodies, especially in such exercises of public and solemn profession. “Glorify God in your bodies,” says the apostle in 1 Corinthians 6:20. And though these you have heard be not the chief duties to be performed at a fast, yet are they duties commanded; and he that makes not conscience of the least commandment of God can have no comfort in his estate: “Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect to all thy commandments” (Ps. 119:6).

Secondly, for exhortation to us all to make conscience of every one of these outward duties that have been commanded to us—that is:

Of joining with the congregation in hearing the Word, even read as well as preached. See what a reverent respect God’s people showed even to the Word read, in Nehemiah 8:3, “The ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law”; and verse 5, “When Ezra opened the book” to read it, “all the people stood up.” Make conscience to join with the

congregation in those prayers that are read as well as in those that are conceived.⁵ For those that are read are holy and good prayers, and all the congregation should make their prayers and supplications with one accord, as they did in Acts 1:14. Hold yourself bound to join with the congregation in singing of psalms also. See how well God showed Himself to be pleased with this duty, in 2 Chronicles 20:22: “When they began to sing, and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon.”

Of giving according to your ability somewhat to the poor (Luke 21:[3]). Christ took notice of them that contributed and praised the poor widow.

To make it a day of restraint in the matter of food of all sorts, so far as your health will permit; in your apparel, so far as decency will permit; in the matter of your delights of all sorts; and in the matter of your worldly affairs.

Yea, of holding out in these duties a whole day.

Take heed of hypocrisy and thinking that your performance of these outward things will serve your turn and merit at God’s hands. When our Savior saw what “an innumerable multitude of people came to hear him, insomuch that they trod one upon another, he began to say to his disciples, first of all, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1). And this caveat we have all just cause to give to you in such great assemblies as this is (especially at our solemn feasts). Take heed of hypocrisy, rest not in nor bless yourselves in the deed you have done. But refer these outward things unto those right ends which I have told you they were ordained for. And remember always that speech of the apostle Paul in Romans 2:29: “He is a Jew which is one inwardly, and

5. I.e., prayers from the prescribed liturgy for the fast, as well as extemporaneous prayers.

circumcision”—so is humiliation also—“is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God.”

Thirdly, for reproof of sundry abuses, which are chief causes why our fasts prevail no more with God.

First, such are to be reprov'd as refuse to join with God's people in this duty and will not separate themselves from their profits and delights, no, not so much as one day in a month, though God calls them to it, and the king also commands them to do it. But like them of Ephraim and Manasseh (of whom we read in 2 Chronicles 30:10), are ready to laugh the officers to scorn and to mock them that in the king's name require them to do it.

Let no man say, “Had we not better have their room than their company? What good can we hope to receive by having such as they to join with us in our fasts?” For (as you have heard) the coming of all in this case would do us good and further our prayers, and this open contempt that such men in all parts do show may make us all fare the worse. You therefore that are officers do what you can to restrain them from their labors and to bring them hither. Remember that you are also comprehended in the number of those servants to whom the charge is given, “Go out, and compel them to come in that my house may be filled” (Luke 14:23).

Secondly, such as do come and join with us (though they do that also but by the halves), but so soon as they are gone forget the occasion of our fasts, remember no longer the affliction of Joseph, give themselves as full liberty to all delights and jollity as if there were no judgments at all upon the land. Mark well how God complains of them that in a time of common calamity did give themselves liberty even in lawful delights. Mark well that speech that you shall find in Isaiah 22:14: “Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from

you till ye die, saith the Lord of hosts.” Why, what had they done? See that, in verse 13: “Behold joy, and gladness, slaying of oxen and killing of sheep, eating of flesh, and drinking of wine.” Why, what evil or unlawfulness was there in all this? True, but this was that which so much provoked the Lord that they gave themselves to this jollity at such a time as “the Lord GOD of hosts did” by His judgments “call them to weeping, and to mourning, to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth,” as we read in verse 12. That they did this with contempt of God’s judgments, saying and resolving with themselves thus profanely and desperately, as verse 13, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die.” And what unlawfulness was there in that which Amos so much complains of in Amos 6:4–6: “in lying upon beds of ivory”; or “in stretching themselves upon their couches”; or in “eating the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall”; or in “chanting to the sound of the viol, and inventing to themselves instruments of music like David”; or in “drinking wine in bowls, and anointing themselves with the chief ointments”? Were any of these things unlawful? No, but because they did this in such a time as Joseph (the church of God) was in great affliction; because they did hereby declare that they were “not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph”; because they did by these means “put far away from them the evil day,” as the prophet speaks in verse 3, and made themselves forgetful and senseless of God’s judgment—therefore was the Lord so highly offended with them for it. Consider of these places (well beloved), and you will easily discern that in such evil times as these are, in times of great calamity, either upon ourselves or upon our brethren, we must all of us somewhat abridge ourselves, both in our feasts and in our bravery and in our lawful delights of all sorts whatsoever. “When the Lord’s sword is sharpened to make a sore slaughter,” says the prophet in Ezekiel 21:10, “when it is

furberished that it may glitter”—much less when we see it has already made a great slaughter among our brethren, as we now see it has, and is even dyed red with their blood—“should we then make mirth?” And if the Lord will not let us in such times the free use of our most lawful delights, what will the Lord say then to the mirth used even in this time of common calamity in our alehouses and at our wakes where lewd men of all sorts “assemble themselves by troops” (Jer. 5:7) to provoke one another to all kinds of lewdness? Will there be any hope our fasts will do much good while our disordered wakes are continued and frequented so in such times as these are?

Thirdly, such as having power in their hand do not endeavor to find out and reform the causes of the plague. Though Joshua and all the elders of Israel should fall upon their faces and cry never so fervently, they can do no good till Achan be found out and punished (Joshua 7). And what hope then can we have to prevail in our fasts, while no care is taken to find out Achan? The idolater is an Achan, and so is the murderer, and so is the adulterer, and so is the blasphemers, and so is the drunkard. And there is power not in Joshua only but in every officer among us, yea, in every man almost to find out our Achans and bring them to punishment. Our Achans are not so secretive as that man was. Our Achans do not hide their accursed things as he did (7:21). Endeavor every one of you to find them out and suppress them, or else our fasts will be of small force with God.

SERMON 4

September 14, 1625

Now it follows that we observe further the inward affection and disposition of David's heart in this his extraordinary prayer. He "humbled," or, afflicted "his soul." And here we must (for the opening of the words and phrase) see what is meant by the humbling and afflicting of his soul and how that is done, for the understanding whereof three things must be observed:

First, that the soul as well as the body is subject both to prosperity, a blessed and comfortable estate, and to adversity also, a woeful and afflicted state and condition—and that not only in the life to come but even in this life also. For the first, see 3 John 2, "I wish thou mayest prosper, and be in health even as thy soul prospereth." And for the other, see Psalm 31:7, "Thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities."

Secondly, that as the prosperity, happiness, and glory of the soul consists in inward peace, tranquility, and joy—"The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy of the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17)—so that which humbles and afflicts it is sorrow and fear and such like affections, which are therefore called the passions and perturbations of the soul. "Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop" (Prov. 12:25)—that is,

that which humbles it. Yea, these affections of sorrow and fear do afflict the soul and put it to pain even as pricks and wounds and the stinging of a serpent would do the body. So it is said in Acts 2:37, “They were pricked in their hearts,” when by Peter’s sermon they were brought to sound grief of heart for sin and fear of God’s wrath. So in Proverbs 23:32, sin is said “at last to bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder” by reason of the extreme anguish which through sorrow and fear it puts the soul unto.

Thirdly, that sometimes the Lord Himself does thus afflict and humble the soul with sorrow and fear, as in Job 5:18: “He woundeth, and his hands make whole.” And the strokes that He gives prove usually extreme and intolerable: “that the bones that thou hast broken may rejoice” (Ps. 51:8). The Lord’s strokes broke his bones. “A wounded spirit who can bear?” (Prov. 18:14). That is, when the wound is given by God’s hand, as in Hebrews 10:31, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” And sometimes God’s people (for the preventing of this) have voluntarily afflicted and humbled their own souls by provoking themselves to sorrow and fear whereby their souls might be humbled, knowing well, “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged of the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:31). And so did David in this place, “I humbled” and afflicted “my soul by fasting.” So says he also in Psalm 69:10, “I wept and chastened my soul by fasting.” And this the apostle enjoins the faithful to do, in James 4:9, “Be afflicted”—he means not bear or suffer the afflictions God lays upon you, but afflict yourselves, as appears in the next words—“and mourn and weep, let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into heaviness.”

Note 4. So then, if we would know the reason why David did fast at this time, it was to humble and afflict his soul, to work his soul to sorrow and grief. And what meant he in this

his extraordinary prayer for these men to afflict his soul thus? Surely, it was to make his prayer more available with God for them. And from this his practice and example, this doctrine arises for our instruction:

DOCTRINE 4. That the chief use of a religious fast is to humble and afflict the soul with sorrow and grief, and a chief thing that makes our prayer effectual with God is the inward humiliation and sorrow of our souls from whence they do proceed.

The Explanation

Two branches there be (you see) of this doctrine, and I will handle them distinctly.

Branch 1

First, a religious fast serves chiefly to this end: to humble and afflict the soul. So in Isaiah 58:5, the fast that God hath chosen is called “a day for a man to afflict his soul in.” This is a duty commanded upon the fast day in Joel 2:13: “Rend your hearts, and not your garments.” See how this is enjoined in Leviticus 23:29: “Whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted upon that day, shall be cut off from his people.” So our Savior gives this for a reason why His disciples could keep no fasts, because they could not mourn while the bridegroom was with them (Matt. 9:15). So that no man can keep a fast well that cannot mourn, that has not a humbled and troubled soul in him on that day.

Therefore, we read that God’s people in their fasts were wont to weep much, and that not only in private and secret fasts, as in Nehemiah 1:4, “I sat down, and wept, and mourned certain days and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,” but in public also, as in Ezra 10:1, “When Ezra prayed, and made confession of sins weeping, and casting himself down

before the house of God, there assembled unto him a very great congregation, and the people wept very sore.” Yea, God commands His people to do so at such times. When God calls us to keep fasts, He “calls us to weeping, and to mourning” (Isa. 22:12). So in Joel 2:12, “Turn you to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning.”

Branch 2

And for the second branch of the doctrine, a chief thing that makes the prayers of God’s people at a fast or at any other time most powerful and effectual with God is the humiliation and sorrow of the soul from which those prayers do proceed. See the proof of this in the most powerful fasts that we read of in Judges 20:26. In that fast wherein Israel prevailed with God for success against the Benjamites after two notable foils before, there were many tears shed. All Israel wept before the Lord, yet were there above ten thousand of as valiant men as ever drew sword. In the fast that was kept in Samuel’s time at Mizpah whereby Israel obtained a marvelous victory against the Philistines, in 1 Samuel 7:10, the Lord “thundered with a great thunder upon the Philistines on that day.” The people wept so abundantly that they are said “to have drawn water,” as by bucketfuls, “and to have poured it out before the Lord” (v. 6). Neither has this been found true at fasts only, but at all times the more the heart of him that prays is humbled, the more power shall his prayer have with God. See this in four notable examples:

It was a powerful prayer that Jacob made when “he had power over the angel, and prevailed” (Hos. 12:4). But mark the story, and you shall find he was marvelously humbled when he did so marvelously prevail. Christ wrestled with him and smote his thigh out of joint (Gen. 32:25), and in Hosea 12:4 it is said he wept, and prayed.

It was a powerful prayer that Hannah, the mother of Samuel, made, when she that was barren by nature obtained a son by it. But Hannah was greatly humbled and afflicted in soul when she made that prayer in 1 Samuel 1:10: “She was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD, and wept sore.”

It was a powerful prayer that Hezekiah made in his sickness, which reversed the sentence that God had given him notice of by His prophet and procured fifteen years more to be added to his life, in 2 Kings 20. But what was it that made it so powerful? Surely, it was the sorrow and humiliation of his heart. For the Lord bids the prophet tell him in 2 Kings 20:5, “I have heard thy prayer and have seen thy tears.”

Lastly, it was a most powerful prayer whereby Manasseh (one of the horriblest sinners that ever lived) prevailed so far that God was entreated of him and heard his supplication in 2 Chronicles 33:13. But when made he that prayer? See verse 12. When “he had humbled himself greatly before the LORD.” Therefore, it is noted by the prophet to be the ordinary course of the afflicted soul that he may prevail in his prayer. “He putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope” (Lam. 3:29). To breed hope in himself that God will regard and show respect to his prayer, he abases and humbles himself in the lowest manner that he can. Insomuch as upon these manifold experiments, God’s people have grown wonderfully confident in this, that when they could bring their hearts to this humiliation and sorrow, their prayers then should certainly prevail with God. See therefore how they have pleaded tears even before God in Psalm 39:12, “Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my cry, hold not thy peace at my tears”; and Psalm 6:6, “All the night long I make my bed to swim, I water my couch with my tears”; and verse 8, “The LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping.” As if he should have said, “My tears cried louder than my tongue could do, and the Lord had more respect

to my tears than to my words.” The Lord (I tell you) makes precious account of the tears of His people: “Put thou my tears in thy bottle, are they not in thy book?” (Ps. 56:8).

The Reasons

The reasons and grounds of this doctrine are worthy to be inquired into, and the reason of two things must be inquired of. (1) What have been the causes of that sorrow and humiliation that God’s people have been wont to afflict their souls with, and which God has had so much respect unto? (2) What are the reasons why God has such delight in this to see His people thus humbled and afflicted in their souls?

Reason 1

For the first, we shall find that the reason and ground of the sorrow of God’s children, that God has been so much delighted in, has been no worldly thing. I deny not but they have also their worldly sorrows, but those make them never a whit the more acceptable to God. We read of divers that have had their hearts afflicted and humbled in great measure, and yet their sorrow pleased God never a whit the more powerful with Him. Nabal’s heart was heavy and sorrowful enough in 1 Samuel 25:37. “It died within him” for grief and fear “and became as a stone.” And so was Judas’s heart heavy enough, in Matthew 27:3–4. And when Esau had lost the blessing and birthright irrecoverably in Genesis 27:34, “He cried out with a great and exceeding bitter cry.” Yea, even at fasts many have afflicted their souls with sorrow and pleased God never a whit nor prayed ever a whit the better, as in Isaiah 58:3: “Wherefore have we afflicted our soul and thou takest no knowledge?” And Zechariah 7:3, “Should I weep in the fifth month separating myself as I have done these so many years?” The Lord denies not that they afflicted their souls and wept in their

fasts, but says in Zechariah 7:5 they did it not unto Him. They respected not the Lord, but themselves in their sorrow. It was not a sorrow according to God. Mark therefore the difference of this sorrow of the godly from the other in four grounds and reasons of their sorrow:

First, the godly have afflicted their souls with sorrow, for the afflictions of others out of a compassion and fellow feeling they have had of their miseries. So did David here. This pleases God well, as we may see in the comfort that Job took in it, in Job 30:25, “Did not I weep for him that was in trouble, was not my soul grieved for the poor?” So in Jeremiah 13:17, “Mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the LORD’s flock is carried away captive.” This would please God well, if we could afflict ourselves. (1) For that fearful sickness whereby God sweeps away so many of our brethren in so uncomfortable a manner. They die in our highways and in our fields without all means of comfort. (2) For the poverty this brings on them that escape. (3) For the captivity of the Lord’s flock in Bohemia and the Palatinate.¹

Secondly, the godly have afflicted their souls with sorrow when the Lord has showed Himself to be angry with them, either by threatening them by His word and prophets or by executing His judgments upon them.

For the first, see two notable examples. The one in Judges 2:2, 5. When the Lord by His messenger had chided Israel for making a league with the Canaanites, and not throwing down their altars, and threatened that therefore He “would not drive them out of their land, but they should be as thorns in their sides, and their gods should be a snare to them, they lift

1. Catholic imperial forces had taken over the Palatinate and Bohemia, driving out the Protestant rulers Frederick and Elizabeth (sister of Charles I of England) in 1620. Despite English efforts, they were not restored. A policy of forced recatholicization was implemented.

up their voice and wept,” and there was such weeping there, as the name of that place was called Bochim. The other example was Josiah. He was humbled in his soul and wept when he heard the Lord’s threats against Judah read out of the Book of the Law in 2 Chronicles 34:27: “Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before the Lord thy God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and humblest thyself before me, and didst rent thy clothes, and weep before me, I have even heard thee, saith the LORD.” Wherein also we may observe how well God is pleased to see His people fall into these passions of fear and sorrow when He by His word does rebuke and threaten them—which the Lord also professes in Isaiah 66:2, “But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” So when God has showed Himself to be angry and displeased with them by executing any of His judgments upon them, they have then been wont, and it was their duty then, to afflict their souls. “If her father,” says the Lord of Miriam, in Numbers 12:14, “had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days?” See a plain proof of this in 2 Chronicles 7:13[–14]: “If I send pestilence among my people, if my people shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face.” Mark, not their own loss by the judgment should trouble them so much as God’s anger. And therefore in their prayer they seek God’s face and favor above all things. And this is very pleasing unto God to see His people humble themselves so under the strokes of His hand. See a notable example of this in 2 Chronicles 12:2–4: Shishak king of Egypt came against Jerusalem with a mighty army, and “took the fenced cities that pertained to Judah, and came to Jerusalem.” See what followed in 2 Chronicles 12:6: “The princes of Israel, and the king humbled themselves, and they said, the LORD is righteous.” And what followed upon that: “And when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves,

the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, they have humbled themselves, therefore I will not destroy them” (v. 7).

Thirdly, when they have seen God dishonored by the sins of others, then have they also mourned and afflicted their souls. Jeremiah professes in Jeremiah 13:17, “If you will not hear, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride.” So David professes that “the zeal of God’s house”—the inward vexation of his soul through zealous sorrow and indignation for the neglect and profanation of God’s worship—“had even eaten him up” and consumed him (Ps. 69:9). Especially the foul sins that they have known in the places (towns, congregations, families) where themselves lived. So it is said of Lot in 2 Peter 2:8, “That righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing vexed his righteous soul from day to day, with their unlawful deeds.” So Paul says the Corinthians should have done, in 1 Corinthians 5:2, “Ye are puffed up and have not rather mourned.” And see how highly God is pleased with this when His people can mourn for this cause: “And the LORD said unto him”—that was “clothed with linen, and had the writer’s inkhorn by his side”—“Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof” (Ezek. 9:3–4).

Fourthly and lastly, the chief cause why they have been so given to mourning and weeping, why they have afflicted themselves so much, has been their own sins, whereby themselves have offended and dishonored God. This David professes was the cause why his sorrow “was continually before him”: he was sorry for his sin (Ps. 38:16–17). This was the cause why Mary Magdalene wept so abundantly that she was able to wash Christ’s feet with her tears: she was a sinner (Luke 7:37–38). This sorrow God wonderfully delights in more than in all outward worship whatsoever. “The sacrifices of God are

a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17).

Reason 2

Now come we to the second inquiry, to find out the true causes and reasons of this why God should so much desire and delight to see His people humbled with sorrow, to see them afflict and chasten their souls in this manner. It is said of Him that He "hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servants" (Ps. 35:27), that He "doth not afflict willingly" (Lam. 3:33), that "in all the afflictions of his people he is afflicted" (Isa. 63:9). And, indeed, it is true that our sorrows in themselves please not God, but only in respect:

First, of the causes and fountains from whence they proceed—that is, (1) they are the work of His own Spirit. It is the Spirit of God only that gives to any man such a fleshy and soft heart, as we may see by that promise in Ezekiel 11:19, "I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within you: and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh," and "I will pour upon them my spirit, and they shall mourn abundantly," says the Lord in Zechariah 12:10. And God must needs take pleasure in the work of His own grace and Holy Spirit. (2) These tears proceed from our love to God. Kindness (you know) causes tears more than anything else; so it is in this case. Christ says of the woman that wept so abundantly that "she loved much" (Luke 7:47). And that which makes men most of all to mourn for sin is the Spirit of grace, which persuades us of God's free love to us and that Christ was pierced by and for us (Zech. 12:10). And this (above many other works of His Spirit) God greatly delights in: "If any man love God, the same is known of him" (1 Cor. 8:3).

Secondly, in respect of the end that this sorrow tends unto, the issue and effect of it the Lord greatly delights in it. He sees

we have need of it: “Now for a season (if need be) you are in heaviness” (1 Peter 1:6). The Lord sees it will do us much good, and therefore He is so well pleased with it. “By the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better” (Eccl. 7:3). (1) It makes us more capable of every grace of God and fitter to receive it. As the vessel that is full can receive no good liquor, but all is spilt that is poured upon it, and the emptier it is, the more it will receive—so is it in this case. “God will give grace to the humble” (James 4:6). For knowledge, “the meek will he teach his way” (Ps. 25:9); and for comfort, “God comforteth those that are cast down” (2 Cor. 7:6).

(2) It works repentance unto salvation. And the heart is never wont to be truly turned unto God and changed, but the change begins here: “Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of” (2 Cor. 7:10).

(3) It makes Christ and God’s word and promises sweet unto us, and all God’s mercies to relish well, as hunger makes us relish our meat, and thirst, our drink: “The full soul loatheth an honeycomb, but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet” (Prov. 27:7). The prodigal, when he had been pinched with hunger, would have been glad with all his heart to have fared as his father’s servants did in Luke 25:19. O what sweetness found Paul in Christ! “I determined,” says he in 1 Corinthians 2:2, “not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” And what made his taste so good? He had been deeply humbled in sense of his sins, as appears plainly by this, that he counted himself “less than the least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8) and the chiefest of all the sinners that Christ came to save (1 Tim. 1:15). And what sweetness did David find in God’s word and promises: “How sweet are thy words unto my taste? Yea sweeter than honey to my mouth” (Ps. 119:103). And how came he to this? O, he had been greatly humbled with sense of sin, as appears in Psalm 40:12:

“Innumerable evils have compassed me about, mine iniquities have taken hold upon me so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head, therefore my heart faileth me.” Yea, this makes all God’s mercies relish well, and our hearts to rejoice and be thankful for them. A farthing token is to a very poor man most acceptable. This we shall see in Jacob’s example. He vowed great thankfulness to God if He would give him but “bread to eat and raiment to put on,” as we see in Genesis 28:20, because he was so humbled in the sense of his own unworthiness and could say, “I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies” (Gen. 32:10).

(4) It makes them seek to God more earnestly. As it is said of our Savior Himself in Luke 22:44, that “being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly”—His inward abasement through anguish of soul did add much to the fervency of His prayer—so it is also with all His members. They never pray so fervently as when they are most humbled and afflicted in spirit: “LORD, in trouble have they visited thee,” says the prophet in Isaiah 26:16, “they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them.”

(5) And lastly, it makes a man fit to walk and converse with God. No man can be fit to do so till then—see Micah 6:8. The Lord requires we should humble ourselves to walk with our God. We can never walk nor converse with God until we can humble ourselves. And that both (a) in respect of the Lord, who cannot delight to converse with any till he be humbled—as no great man will be familiar with a saucy, unmannerly fool, that knows not how to carry himself before his betters nor to give due respect unto him. God cannot abide that “flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Cor. 1:29), and, “The afflicted people thou wilt save: but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down” (2 Sam. 22:28). The more we are humbled in ourselves, the more the Lord delights in

us to be and to converse with us. “Though the LORD be high,” says the psalmist in Psalm 138:6, “yet hath he respect unto the lowly, but the proud he knows afar off.” And Isaiah 57:15: He will dwell with him that is of a contrite, and humble spirit. (b) In respect of ourselves, we are never fit to walk with God, till we be truly humbled. We cannot serve God so as to please Him till we can do it with reverence and fear—see Hebrews 12:28. Till then, we cannot hear the Word as we should. “All thy saints are in thine hands,” says Moses in Deuteronomy 33:3, “and they are humbled at thy feet, to receive thy words.” Till then, we can never pray as we should. Till we can consider, “God is in the heaven,” of high and incomprehensible majesty, “and we are upon earth,” base and vile worms, we shall be apt to be rash with our mouths, and our heart will be hasty to utter anything before God, as Solomon speaks in Ecclesiastes 5:2. Till then, men will never be fearful to offend Him. No, we can never know Him nor ourselves rightly till we have been soundly humbled. “I have heard of thee,” says Job in Job 42:[5], “by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee.” Job had a true and saving knowledge of God before (as he had also been truly humbled in soul before), but nothing to that he had when God had thoroughly humbled him. And so it is said of Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33:12–13, that when he “was in affliction, and had humbled himself greatly; then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God.” Till then, we cannot yield any acceptable and constant obedience unto God. “They are not humbled even unto this day, neither have they feared, nor walked in my law, nor in my statutes, that I set before you, and before your fathers” (Jer. 44:10).

SERMON 5

October 12, 1625

*T*wo uses this doctrine serves unto principally. First, for exhortation, and then for comfort.

And first, to exhort us that we would all of us strive to attain to this grace that David here speaks of and has been commended unto us in this doctrine—that is, to be able to afflict our own souls with godly sorrow. And for my better proceeding in handling of this use and for the help of your memory and edification, I will deliver unto you (1) the motives whereby you may be provoked to seek this grace; (2) the means you must use for the attaining of it; (3) the signs and tokens whereby you may discern it.¹

The Motives

First, motives, I say; for you had need to have forcible reasons showed you why you should desire it. None of us desire it as we ought. Most men abhor all sorrow. They “put far away the evil day” (Amos 6:3) and give themselves to all means of mirth that they can devise (vv. 5–6). And even in these times wherein the Lord by so many means “calls to mourning, and to weeping,

1. Note that these three points will be spread out through this sermon and the next.

behold joy, and gladness,” everywhere as it was in the prophet’s time (Isa. 22:12–13)—“every man’s heart is in the house of mirth” (Eccl. 7:4). You had need therefore have forcible motives given you to persuade you to seek and labor for godly sorrow, for an afflicted and humbled heart. In the stone of the kidney or bladder, men need not be persuaded to desire or seek remedy, but in the stone of the heart they do.

Motive 1

First, consider the examples of God’s servants, whom God in His Word has commended to us and whom we count happy men, as the apostle speaks in James 5:11; and we shall see they were men of tender hearts. They were deeply humbled and much given to mourning and weeping for their sins. David was much given to weeping for sin. He spent whole nights in weeping abundantly (Ps. 6:6). And Peter, when he repented, “wept bitterly” in Matthew 26:75. And Paul was so humbled all his days for the sins he committed before his calling that he counted himself not worthy to be called an apostle (1 Cor. 15:9). Yea, he judged himself “less than the least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8). Yea, they have been brought to the very point and brink of despair, before they could come to comfort. So was Asaph when he cried in Psalm 73:26, “My flesh and my heart faileth.” And so was Heman when he complained in Psalm 88:15, “While I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted.” And so was David also when he said thus in his prayer unto God in Psalm 40:12, “Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so as I am not able to look up, they are more than the hairs of my head, therefore my heart faileth me.”

But these were fouler sinners (you will say) than ever you were. I will show you therefore examples of such as whose sins were as small as yours. Job was never tainted with so foul sins as you have been, and yet his eyes were wont to “pour out tears

unto God” (Job 16:20). He for that very forwardness and impatience he showed in so great affliction abhorred himself, and repented in dust, and ashes (42:6). David’s heart was so soft and tender that it smote him when he had but cut off the skirt of Saul’s garment in 1 Samuel 24:5. The poor man whose child Christ dispossessed burst out into tears even for the weakness of his faith in Mark 9:24. Paul was marvelously humbled even for his original sin in Romans 7:24: “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

Consider these examples well, and you must needs conclude with yourself, “(1) Surely, it must needs be a good thing. (2) Surely, it must needs be a necessary thing that all God’s people have been so much given unto. Surely, I have as much cause as they had to weep and be deeply humbled for my sins.”

But I will give you another example far greater than all these. Your blessed Savior, that had no sin, was much given to mourning and weeping for the sins that you and such as you are have committed. He mourned for the hardness of the hearts, even of His enemies (Mark 3:5). He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). His soul was “exceeding sorrowful, unto death” (Matt. 26:38). He “offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying, and tears” (Heb. 5:7).

Say not, “I have the less cause to grieve for my sins, because He grieved so much for them.” “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isa. 53:4). For you must become conformable unto Him in His sufferings, or you shall never have comfort in them (see Rom. 6:5; 8:29). Say therefore to your own soul, “If all God’s people have been so apt to weep and mourn, what am I?”

But before I proceed to the second motive, two questions and doubts must be answered, that may arise from the first. *Question 1.* Can I not be in the state of grace, unless I match these examples and be so tenderhearted and apt to mourn as

they? *Answer 1.* I answer, first, you may. All God's children have not been humbled nor broken in heart in the same measure and degree, and two reasons there be of the difference.

First, in the persons themselves. Some of them have been more heinous sinners than others. And according to the proportion of men's sins has and must be the measure of men's humiliation. The more heinous the sin, the deeper and of the longer continuance must the sorrow be.

Of Manasseh it is said in 2 Chronicles 33:12, "He humbled himself greatly before God." Of David, in Psalm 51:8, that his anguish and sorrow for sin was like to the pain a man feels that has his bones broken. Of Mary Magdalene, that she wept so abundantly as she could wash Christ's feet with her tears in Luke 7:38. Think upon this, you that have been guilty of murder, persecution, whoredom, or such like heinous sins; your sorrow must be proportionate to the heinousness of your sins.

The second reason of the difference is in the Lord, who is the only worker and giver of this grace. For as in other graces He is pleased to give them in greater measure to some of His elect than to others (Matt. 13:23). In some elect ground, the seed of the word yields but thirty; in some, sixty; in some, a hundredfold. So it is in this.

Ordinarily, the Lord uses by the spirit of bondage and legal terrors to prepare men to their conversion and deeply to humble them, to give them the spirit of bondage (Rom. 8:15). But we read of no such thing in the first conversion of Matthew, though he had been a publican. For at his very first conversion, he made a great feast to Christ in Matthew 9:9–10. Nor in those Peter converted; for though they were pricked in their hearts and deeply humbled before they believed (Acts 2:37), yet did their sorrow and fear continue nothing so long upon them as David's did. They quickly attained to comfort in the assurance of pardon in Acts 2:41, 46. Lydia's example I do

of purpose omit, for she (though she believed not in Christ till she heard Paul in Acts 16:14) yet was converted and feared God before verse 13.

Secondly, yet know this, that all God's elect (1) find in themselves this humiliation even with legal terrors at one time or another. For Christ was sent to preach the gospel to none but to the brokenhearted, to the captives, to the bruised (Luke 4:18)—that is, to such as had the spirit of bondage (Rom. 8:15). (2) All God's faithful and true-hearted people are in some true measure humbled and can mourn and weep and afflict their souls for sin, for they are all oft in Scripture styled by this title. They are called "the humble" (Ps. 34:2), "an afflicted and poor people" (Zeph. 3:12), "the poor of the flock" (Zech. 11:7, 11), "poor"—he means in spirit—in Matthew 5:3 and Psalm 34:6. They hold themselves bound to aim at the best marks and to strive to be like them that have most excelled in this grace of brokenness of spirit and ability to mourn for sin: "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them that walk so, as ye have us for an example" (Phil. 3:17). You are therefore in a woeful case if you neither can mourn for your sin nor strive to do it.

Question 2. But yet there is a second question to be resolved. "For we hear," may some say, "that Job and David and Peter and Paul and Hezekiah and Josiah and Christ have been much given to weeping. In their mourning for sin, they have wept much. Can I not be in the state of grace, can I not have truly repented nor been humbled for my sin, unless I can do as they did, unless I can weep for my sin?"

Answer 1. I answer, first, that [though] the grief and mourning for sin be absolutely necessary unto unfeigned repentance, tears are not always so. And I will show you two reasons of the difference that is to be observed between God's people in this point:

First, the constitution of some men's bodies makes them much more unapt to weep than others are.

Secondly, the very extremity of grief sometimes so oppresses and overwhelms men's hearts (as David complains of himself in Psalm 143:4, "My spirit is overwhelmed within me, my heart within me is desolate"), as they cannot ease themselves either by words or tears. God's people have been oft in that extremity of grief as they could not pray—I mean, not express in words the desires of their heart, but with sighs and groaning (Rom. 8:26). In extremity of sorrow, some men cannot weep. It is said of David and his company in 1 Samuel 30:4, "They had no more power to weep." So that I may say to you that if you can by the signs that I shall by and by give you approve that you are able soundly to mourn and be humbled for your sins, though you cannot weep for them, you may be in the state of grace for all that.

Answer 2. But secondly, I answer that if the constitution of your body will serve you to weep for other things, and yet you could never weep for your sins, surely your case is fearful. As to the man that can remember other things well enough—a tale, a play—but a sermon, a chapter of the Bible he cannot remember and excuses the matter thus, "My memory is naught," I may say it is naught indeed with a witness; it is sinfully, it is damnably naught. So to you that can weep for other things but not for sin, I may say, flatter not yourself but strive to be able to do as you hear other the good servants of God have done, and that God has been so highly pleased with them for, strive to be able to weep for your sins.

Motive 2

The second motive to persuade you to seek for this grace is the consideration of the manifold promises God has made in His Word to them that can afflict their souls and be rightly

humbled for sins and the great benefit that this grace will bring with it.

Promise 1

First, this sorrow shall not be everlasting (Rev. 7:17), but it shall end in comfort. You shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. “They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy” (Ps. 126:5). “It is appointed unto them that mourn in Zion, that they shall have the oil of joy given them for their mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isa. 61:3). The Lord, who is the Father of mercies and God of all consolation, is called a “God that comforteth all those that are cast down” (2 Cor. 7:6). Never found God’s people that comfort in God’s mercy and in the assurance of the pardon of their sins as when they have been most humbled and able to weep most for their sins. “The meek shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel” (Isa. 29:19). The day of humiliation when God’s people afflict their souls before Him is called a day of atonement in Leviticus 23:27. For so is God’s promise in Zechariah 13:1, “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin, and for uncleanness.” First, no man need fear he shall bring himself to desperation if he give way to this tenderness of heart and sorrowing for sin. For there is no such medicine in the world to free your heart from legal and desperate fears and sorrows and to bring your heart to sweet peace and comfort in God as this is, if you could rightly mourn and be humbled for your sin. When those poor wretches that had crucified Christ and were pricked in their hearts with intolerable fears and sorrows and anguish of soul for it and cried out to the apostles “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37), mark what remedy Peter prescribes them, in verse 38: “Repent,” says he. Why? Did they not repent already of that

which they had done? Yes, with legal repentance for endangering themselves, but his meaning is, repent and mourn that you have offended God. And indeed so is God's promise in Isaiah 57:15, "I will dwell with him that is of a contrite, and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." He may be sure to have his heart revived and comforted, that can be humbled enough.

Secondly, yea, there is no such remedy against worldly sorrow as this: if when we feel our hearts dejected with any sorrow for any worldly cross we would labor to turn our heart from the consideration of the cross to the consideration of our sin that has been the cause of it. And this remedy you shall find prescribed in Lamentations 3:39, "Wherefore doth a living man complain"—chafe and fret and disquiet himself—"a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search, and try our ways."

Application. I beseech you lay this second motive to your hearts, every one of you. (1) Many of you never yet had any comfort in God, in the assurance of the pardon of your sins, never found sweetness in Christ nor in God's promises. (2) Many of you are much disquieted with legal and desperate fears. (3) Many of you are always heavyhearted, sometimes by reason of crosses you meet with, and sometimes you know not why. And what is the true cause of all this? You were never yet rightly humbled for your sins. Why will you continue in this uncomfortable estate? Learn to mourn and weep for your sins, and that will help all.

Promise 2

The second promise made unto it and benefit this sorrow will bring is that it will make us capable of and able to thrive in every saving grace. This benefit you shall find pressed as a motive unto this in 1 Peter 5:5–6: "God giveth grace to

the humble, humble yourselves therefore,” says the apostle, “under the mighty hand of God.” And in James 4:6–7, 9: “God giveth grace to the humble, submit yourselves therefore to God, be afflicted, and mourn and weep.” Men use not to come to the rock to be well grounded and settled in grace till they have dug deep (Luke 6:48). Such shall attain to a clear and certain and sanctified knowledge of the truth. See Psalm 25:9: “The humble he will teach his way.” Such shall get power over their corruptions: “Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of” (2 Cor. 7:10). And, “Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance, the heart is made better” (Eccl. 7:3). These tears are of a purging and cleansing nature. No soap, no niter is so effectual to get the spots and stains out of cloth, as these are to wash out the spots of your soul. That which Solomon says of a slanderer in Proverbs 25:23, “An angry countenance will drive him away,” may be said of this: if sin be not cockered² and made much of, if we would show ourselves discontented, sad, and heavy while it tarries with us, this would drive it away.

Application. Take this also to heart, I pray you. (1) Many of you complain or have just cause to complain [that] you thrive not in any saving grace. You are like Pharaoh’s kine³: though you live in never so good pasture, yet are you still as ill-favored, as lean as ever you were (Gen. 41:19, 21). (2) Many of you are extremely ignorant and unsettled in your religion—unstable souls, as the apostle speaks in 2 Peter 3:16. (3) Many of you complain you cannot overcome nor get power over any corruption. You cry with the apostle in Romans 7:15—though not with that success that he did—“That which I do I allow not, for what I would that I do not, but what I hate that do I.”

2. *Cokered*: pampered, fondled, or indulged.

3. *Kine*: cattle.

Learn to know the true cause of all this: you were never yet rightly humbled for sin. If you could be humbled and learn to mourn for your sin, God would give you more grace.

Promise 3

Thirdly, the Lord has promised His special protection, assistance, and mercy in the evil day, the day of His wrath and judgments, unto such as are rightly humbled and can mourn for their sins. See Psalm 18:27, “Thou wilt save the afflicted people”; and Psalm 34:18, “He saveth such as be of a contrite spirit”; and Job 22:29, “When men are cast down then thou shalt say, there is a lifting up, he shall save the humble person.” And this promise God has been wont to make good, one of these three ways:

Either by turning away the judgment that He had threatened, as in 2 Chronicles 32:26: “Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart (both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem) so that the wrath of the LORD came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah.” Yea, to show what sound humiliation is able to do, the very counterfeit of it has been very effectual this way for the turning away of judgments. See 2 Chronicles 12:12: when Rehoboam humbled himself, “the wrath of the LORD turned from him, so that he would not destroy him altogether, and also in Judah things went well.” The like we may see in the example of a worse man than he in 1 Kings 21:29: “Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Therefore I will not bring the evil in his days.”

Or by hiding His servants from the judgment and providing for their safety in the common calamity, as He did just Lot, that was “vexed with the filthy conversation of the Sodomites” (2 Peter 2:7). This our God can do: “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2 Peter 2:9). For, “to him belong the issues of death” (Ps. 68:20).

Or, if He see it not good to do either of the former, by sealing them and setting His mark upon them, giving them by His Spirit further assurance of His favor and strength of grace to endure the calamity (for that is God's seal and mark [Eph. 1:13]); and so did the Lord with those humbled souls that went into captivity in Ezekiel 9:4: "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof."

Application. Consider well of this benefit I pray you. (1) We live now in an evil time. The plague has devoured many thousands already; and we may all see cause enough to fear, it may come nearer to every one of us than yet it has done. (2) The Lord does also threaten us with the sword. You have heard of the intentions of our enemies abroad.⁴ (3) All men's hearts are disquieted with fear. Few have any inward peace and security in their minds. Learn therefore to know how we might remedy this. Certainly, if we could learn to afflict ourselves and mourn for our sins, we need not fear either the plague or the papists. God would be "a refuge for us, a refuge in times of trouble" (Ps. 9:9). O that God's people throughout the land could humble themselves more for sin, for the sins of the land and for their own sins. O that we could do it, that are here now. Remember what is said in Proverbs 14:26: "In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence, and his children shall have a place of refuge."

Promise 4

Fourthly, the Lord has promised that the prayers of such shall prevail mightily with Him both for themselves and others. You know what is said of Jacob in Hosea 12:4: "He had power over

4. Catholic imperial forces.

the angel, and prevailed, he wept and made supplications unto him.” And of Hezekiah in Isaiah 38:5: “I have heard thy prayers, I have seen thy tears, behold I will add unto thy days fifteen years.” And what need we more examples when we have the Lord’s express word and promise for this in Psalm 10:17: “LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble, thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.” When the prophet had said, “The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth them” (Ps. 34:17), he gives this for the reason in verse 18, “The LORD is nigh to them that are of a broken heart.” “If my people that are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, then will I hear from heaven” [2 Chron. 7:14]. Yea, for others also, God will hear them. “My servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept” (Job 42:8).

Application. We all complain, and not without cause, as Job did in Job 30:20: “I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not.”

And we account it (if we be as we should be) the chief privilege and comfort we have in this life to have audience and respect with God in our prayers. “This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14).

Take notice of a chief cause thereof, and as you desire God should have more respect to your prayers, labor to be more humbled for your sins.

SERMON 6

November 9, 1625

Follows now the third and last motive:¹ that this is the best way to prevent the Lord from afflicting and humbling our souls with His own hand, when we have learned to humble and afflict our own souls. For this is a certain truth: sin will bring sorrow sooner or later—that cannot be avoided. Sin is therefore called sorrow, because sorrow is an inevitable effect and consequence of it—see Ecclesiastes 11. When he had said, in verse 9, “Rejoice, O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes, but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment,” he adds, in verse 10, “Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh.” When sin has gone before, sorrow (even sorrow and affliction of soul for sin) will follow. “In the transgression of a wicked man there is a snare” (Prov. 29:6)—that is, that which will fill their hearts with deadly sorrow and heaviness, as appears by the next words, “but the righteous sing, and rejoice.” Jeremiah 2:19 says, “Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, know therefore, and see that it

1. Note that this is the third motive following the first two in the last sermon.

is an evil thing, and bitter that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee.” Your sins certainly will be bitter to you one day, sooner or later. Take this for an undoubted truth, you must either temporally here or eternally hereafter in hell lament and bewail and weep for your sins. See Luke 13:28, “There shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and your selves thrust out.” How much more when they shall see and feel the torments that are prepared in hell for them? Now, when God as an angry judge strikes and afflicts the soul with sorrow for sin, even in this life, O that sorrow is terrible and intolerable. When He smites the heart, He so sets it on as no man is able to abide it: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). “A wounded spirit”—that is, which God in His anger has wounded—“who can bear?” (Prov. 18:14). “Who can stand before his indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him” (Nah. 1:6).

And the best way to prevent the Lord from wounding and afflicting our souls is to smite and afflict our own hearts for our sins. The way to prevent those intolerable and everlasting sorrows which God in His fury will bring upon wicked men is to work our hearts to this godly sorrow ourselves and to humble our own souls. This is plain by that speech of the apostle in 1 Corinthians 11:31, “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged of the Lord”—he means as appears in the next verse.

Application. O think of this, you merry Greek,² that are all for mirth and pleasure; you drunkard and whoremaster that finds such joy and sweetness in your sin; you pleasant-witted

2. *You merry Greek:* you merry fellow.

fellow, that can so wittily break jests upon religion and the servants of God, that you can set all the company on laughing—the time will come when your sins which you cannot abide to think of shall be “set in order before thine eyes” (Ps. 50:21), that you shall not be able to look off from them. They shall never be out of your thought. You that cannot abide to hear of your sins nor to be told of them nor reproved for them by any of God’s servants, who are (as Elihu speaks in Job 33:6–[7]) “in God’s stead unto thee, formed out of the clay, as well as thyself: whose terror need not make thee afraid,” shall one day hear the Lord Himself reproving you for them: “I will reprove thee,” says He in Psalm 50:21. And that will be such a kind of reproving as is mentioned in Psalm 2:5: “Then shall he speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.” Better to have a hundred of God’s poor servants to reprove you, than to have the Lord do it. You that cannot abide to let any sadness or sorrow for sin to come near your heart, but hate sorrow as the devil and abandon it from you with all your might, do what you can, sooner or later it will seize upon you. When God’s servants that have been much given to mourning for sin “shall sing for joy of heart, thou shalt cry for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit” (Isa. 65:14). “Woe unto you that laugh now: for ye shall mourn and weep” (Luke 6:25).

Yea, think of this, all you that fear God: were it not much better for you to take pains with your own hearts to humble and afflict them, than to leave it to God to do in His wrath? You have heard He will certainly do it if you do it not, and the way to prevent Him from doing it is to do it yourselves.

And these are the motives that may stir up in every one of us a desire to seek for this grace of a humbled and broken heart.

It follows now that I show you the means whereby you may attain it. And these are of two sorts: (1) some such as wherein you must use the help of others; (2) some such as wherein you must be the agents yourselves.³

Of the first sort, I will name to you but two:

The Ministry of the Word

The first is the ministry of the Word. If you would have a soft heart, able to mourn for sin, you must conscionably frequent the faithful ministry of the Word, strive to live under a forcible ministry, such as will search your heart. No means in the world have ever wrought so mightily to the saving, humbling, and afflicting of the soul as this has done. By this means, they that had crucified Christ and were so hardened in their sin, when they saw that wonderful miracle, even the apostles that were poor Galileans speak in all languages the wonderful things of God, they “mocked them, and said, these men are full of wine” (Acts 2:13)—[then they] were so pricked and wounded in their hearts, that they knew not what to do, till the same hand that wounded them had healed them again, as you may read in Acts 2:37, 41. And what was it that brought David to such a saving sense of his sin in numbering of the people, that his heart smote him for it, and he cried, “I have sinned greatly in that I have done, I have done very foolishly” (2 Sam. 24:10)? Surely, God had sent Gad, the prophet, unto him, as you may see in the next words: “For when David was up in the morning, the word of the LORD came unto the prophet Gad, David’s seer, saying,” etc. (v. 11). And though it be said of Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33:12 that “when he was in affliction he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before him,”

3. Note that the first sort are covered in the present sermon; the second, in the one following.

yet if you look into the eighteenth verse of that chapter, you shall find he had a mightier and stronger means to work that humiliation in his heart than his affliction was. The Lord had sent to him “seers, and prophets that spake unto him in the name of the LORD.” His affliction was but a subordinate means to make him the better able to receive profit by the Word. The words and ministry of the seers was that which wrought this mighty work. There is more force in the ministry of the Word to work sound and saving humiliation than in all the afflictions in the world. Psalm 94:12 says, “Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law.” See a notable experiment of this in Rehoboam and the princes of Judah, in 2 Chronicles 12:2, 6. When God had for their apostasy sent Shishak, king of Egypt, with a mighty and invincible army against them and brought them thereby into extreme peril and distress, He sent Shemaiah, the prophet, unto them to declare unto them the true cause of that judgment and to bring them to an effectual sight and sense of their sin. And then (not before) they “humbled themselves, and confessed that the LORD was righteous.” God’s judgments and corrections without the Word use not to work savingly. Indeed, they serve (1) to prepare and make the heart fitter to receive and profit by the Word; (2) to stir up those sparks and make them to burn which the Word had before cast into the heart and were covered as with ashes. But without the Word, they use not to work savingly. But the Word even without affliction has done mighty things this way. “Is not my word like as a fire, saith the LORD? And like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jer. 23:29). Would you then have your heart softened? Bring it to this fire. If it be as hard as iron, it will soften it and make it pliable. Bring it to this anvil where the hammer smites, and it will break it. For, first, this is ordained and sanctified of God to

be a glass⁴ that will clearly and evidently discover to us all our spots and deformities, as the apostle teaches us in James 1:23. Secondly, God has promised to accompany this ordinance of His with the divine power and efficacy of His Holy Spirit: “I will be with you,” says our Savior in Matthew 28:20, “unto the end of the world.” And therefore it is no marvel though it be so mighty this way.

Objection. “A likely matter,” will you say, “for where have you harder and profaner hearts than such as are daily beaten upon by this hammer?” *Answer 1.* I answer, first, that the hardened and reprobate heart is made the harder by the strokes of this hammer, especially such hearts as once were softened and are grown hard again, even as the [black]smith’s iron is. To some, the word is a savor “of death unto death” (2 Cor. 2:16).

Answer 2. Secondly, the true cause why so many hear us daily and in their hearts are never a whit mollified by it, is this: in many of our hearers the Lord works not with us. No, alas, in these days the Lord works with us but in few. And if He be not with us, if He work not with us, we can do nothing. When God bade Moses take his rod and smite the rock in Horeb, He told him He would stand before him on the rock. And then when God stood upon the rock, Moses smote the rock, and water gushed out of it abundantly (Ex. 17:5–6). If God had not been there, Moses’s smiting the rock would have done nothing. So it is in this case.

Answer 3. Thirdly, this I say, that such as God has in mercy ordained to give a soft heart unto shall feel their hearts mollified more by this than by any other means. And if this will not soften your heart, I assure you nothing will do it.

Application. This being so, O that we who are God’s ministers would more diligently and carefully apply ourselves to this

4. *Glass:* mirror.

work and stir up ourselves in our ministry not only to reprove sin but to do it feelingly and conscionably, so as may be most effectual to bring God's people to sound humiliation for sin. If we would bring them to lament for sin, we must mourn to them ourselves, as our Savior speaks in Matthew 11:17, and not by our Epicurism⁵ and riotous lives proclaim unto them that we are far from having humbled souls in ourselves for our own sins.

And O, that you that are God's people would seek for and desire this help from us in our ministry to soften your hearts and further you in this work of humiliation of soul for sin. Certainly, you should desire and seek for all good helps this way. When God denounced against His people the heavy judgment of the Babylonish captivity and provokes them to humiliation and repentance for the preventing of it, "Consider ye," says He in Jeremiah 9:17–18, "and call for the mourning women, that they may come, and send for cunning women that they may come, and let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters." He alludes to the custom they had in funerals and such occasions of mourning to hire certain women that by their skill in singing doleful songs might increase their heaviness and make them more apt to mourn. But his meaning is to teach them that in such a time as that was, wherein they had also just cause to mourn and humble themselves, they should use all the best helps they could to provoke themselves unto sorrow. And surely we should all learn to do so in this case, seeing humiliation for sin is so necessary, and the ministry of the word is a singular means to work our hearts to it. We should therefore desire (so far as the good order that God has established in His church will permit) to hear such as whose

5. Epicurus (341–270 BC) was a Greek philosopher who taught that pleasure and luxury were the greatest good.

ministry is most powerful and effectual for the softening of a hard heart.

The Private Admonition of Others

The second means wherein we must use the help of others is the benefit of private admonition and reproof. They that would have their hearts softened to be able to mourn and weep for sin must not be unwilling to be admonished and reproofed for sin in private by some faithful friend, either minister or other, but count it a great benefit and desire it rather.

First, certainly God has given authority and a straight charge to all His people to watch one over another and to call upon and admonish and reprove one another. “Let us consider one another to provoke unto love, and good works” (Heb. 10:24). “Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 Thess. 3:15). “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart, thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him” (Lev. 19:17).

Secondly, God has sanctified and ordained this for a means to reclaim poor sinners, to bring them to a saving sight and sense of their sin and keep them from hardening their hearts in it. Matthew 18:15 says, “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go, and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother; but if not, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be to thee as a heathen man, and a publican” (vv. 16–17)—as if he had said, “Count not his case desperate till this course has been taken with him.”

Thirdly, God has oft blessed this course wonderfully. “Then they that feared the LORD, spake oft one to another, and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance

was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name” (Mal. 3:16). This was the means whereby God’s people were kept from the profaneness and security of those times, and God was wonderfully pleased with it. Yea, many a heart has been mollified this way, which the public ministry could not soften. Nathan’s private dealing with David prevailed more with him than all the public means he had enjoyed in a whole year in 2 Samuel 12:7–13.

Fourthly, count it therefore a great blessing of God to you to have such a friend or such a minister as will watch over you and deal thus privately and plainly with you. Yea, seek for such friends. It is said of Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20:8 that he had brought David into a covenant of the Lord with him. We should labor to get such friends as we might make this covenant with. Yea, we should beg of God to give us such a friend. “Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil that shall not break my head” (Ps. 141:5). And we have all great need of it, for self-love so blinds us as we cannot see that which is amiss in ourselves. In these last times especially, men “shall be lovers of themselves,” as the apostle teaches us in 2 Timothy 3:2.

Application. And what marvel then if there be nowadays so much security and hardness of heart among Christians. No man holds himself bound to watch over his brother, to admonish or reprove him; but every man says in his heart as Cain did in Genesis 4:9, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” The papists shall rise up in judgment against us in this, for they take all opportunities to gain others to antichrist. They (like the scribes and Pharisees of whom our Savior speaks in Matthew 23:15) do “compass sea and land to make one proselyte.” But we have no care at all to gain any unto Christ. And on the other side, all men are unwilling to be admonished and plainly dealt with in private, even by the minister of God, but are apt to say to

any that would admonish them as the Sodomites did to Lot in Genesis 19:9, “Stand back, this fellow will needs be a judge.” But know for a certainty that you that are so unwilling to hear of your sin and to be plainly dealt with about it are in love with your sin and have no desire to bring your heart to godly grief and sorrow for it.

SERMON 7

December 7, 1625

It follows now that we come to those means wherein we are to be the principal agents ourselves.

For though this (to speak properly) be the mighty work of God to humble and mollify the heart of man and make it able to mourn for sin, according to that promise in Ezekiel 11:19, “I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and I will give them an heart of flesh,” yet may we (after we are once regenerated) do much to further this great work of God in ourselves. Therefore, we see David professes here that he afflicted his own soul, and in Psalm 69:10 that “he chastened his soul.” And of Josiah it is said that he did humble himself before God (2 Chron. 34:27); and of Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33:12 that he “humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.” Yea, God’s people are commanded in the day of their fast in Leviticus 23:27, to afflict their own souls; and in Joel 2:13, to rend their hearts; and in Jeremiah 4:3–4 to break up their fallow ground, and to circumcise and take away the foreskin of their own hearts. By all which places it appears we may ourselves do much in this work, yea, that we must be doers in it ourselves, or else it will never be well done. And certainly, if we would do what we might, our hearts would be much softer and better able to mourn for our sins than they are.

Question. If any of you shall ask me, “Why, what can we do, or what should we do to work our hearts to this godly sorrow?”
Answer. I answer, there are four principal things that we may do and that we must do, if we would get broken and humbled hearts. For (1) we must make choice of a fit time; (2) of a fit place; (3) when we have so done, we must examine our hearts seriously and impartially; (4) we must pray to God for His assistance in this business.

A Fit Time

First, we must take a fit time to go about this work. For though this be but a matter of circumstance, yet have God’s people found much help unto spiritual duties even in this. Daniel for his private prayer made choice of the time that God had appointed for the evening sacrifice (Dan. 9:21). And so did Cornelius, as will appear if you compare Acts 10:30 and 31 together. Our blessed Savior made choice of the evening for this purpose sometimes (Matt. 14:23), and sometimes of the morning early before day (Mark 1:35). And as all our time is not to be spent in mourning, so are there some times and seasons fitter for this purpose and such as will yield us more help in this work than other some will do. “There is a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance” (Eccl. 3:4). And it is the wisdom of a Christian to discern and take the fittest time for this purpose. “A wise man’s heart discerneth both time and judgment,” says Solomon in Ecclesiastes 8:5. And Ephesians 5:15–16 says, “Walk not as fools, but as wise men, redeeming the time.” The wisdom of a man (you see) consists much in the husbanding of his time well and making choice of the fittest time for every purpose and action that he takes in hand.

And what times are the fittest (may you say) for this purpose? I answer, it is profitable for a man every day to be

doing somewhat in this work by observing his own ways and calling himself to an account for them. For, first, the apostle tells us we are in danger to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin if we do not exhort or stir up ourselves daily (Heb. 3:13).

Secondly, the time of our death is very uncertain, and such servants (we know) as have great dealings for their master and look to be called to a strict account they know not how soon will look every day into their accounts and have them in a readiness continually. And surely this is our case. We know not how soon our accounts will be called for. "Watch ye therefore (for ye know not when the master of the house will come), lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping."

Thirdly, this would help us greatly in our daily prayers unto God. The more sense and sorrow for sin we have when we pray, the more acceptable certainly would our prayers be unto God. See Psalm 34. When David had said in verse 17, "The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth them," he tells us in verse 18 what cries and prayers of the righteous they be that the Lord has such respect unto. "The LORD is nigh," says he, "to them that are of a broken heart." If we would strive in our daily prayers when we make confession of our sins to do it with feeling and not formally, it would not only make our prayers more effectual with God but keep our hearts from hardening and bring them to a good temper. When the publican made confession of his sins with that feeling, "smiting upon his breast, and saying, God be merciful to me a sinner," it is said he "went home to his house justified rather than the other" (Luke 18:13-14).

Fourthly, this daily accustoming ourselves unto this work of calling ourselves to account and afflicting our hearts for our sins would make it more easy and familiar unto us when we shall have extraordinary occasion to betake ourselves to

it. That which is said by the prophet of the Lord's chastening of us may fitly be applied to this chastening of ourselves: "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth" (Lam. 3:27) and to have been accustomed to stoop unto and to bear patiently the Lord's afflicting hand. By this that has been said you see it is good for us to be doing somewhat in this work every day.

Yet there are five special times and seasons that will yield us great help in this business more than other times will do. The first fit time to work our hearts to godly sorrow is presently after some fall we have received, some gross sin we have slipped into. A great advantage it will be unto us to humble our souls for it presently and without delay. For, first, sin newly committed may be better known and remembered with all the circumstances whereby it is aggravated. And that is a great help to the humiliation of the soul, as we may perceive in David's speech in Psalm 51:3, "For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." Secondly, the heart will not be so hardened by sin that is newly committed but more easily wrought upon and softened than when sin has lain long upon it. As a bone that is out of joint, the longer it is neglected will be set again with more difficulty and pain. A leopard may as soon leave his spots, an Ethiopian his blackness, as he can do his sin that has lain long in it (Jer. 13:23).

Secondly, another fit season for this work is when we prepare ourselves to renew our covenant with God in the Holy Sacrament. For (1) at that time God requires of us a special care to examine ourselves and call to mind our sins and to judge ourselves for them, else it is not possible we should receive worthily (1 Cor. 11:28–29, 31). "When thou bringest thy gift to the altar," says our Savior in Matthew 5:23, as at the Lord's Table we do offer and present ourselves unto God our souls and bodies as a holy, reasonable, and lively sacrifice unto

Him, “and there remember that thy brother hath ought against thee.” Teaching us at that time especially we should remember and call to mind what our brother and, much more, what our heavenly Father has against us. (2) At that time men (if they have any spark of grace in them) are apt to find in themselves some stirrings of their affections unto goodness, some motions of God’s Spirit, some dispositions unto devotion and remorse for sin. Ministers that use to deal privately with their people at that time shall find them more easy to be wrought upon (and so shall every man his own heart) than at other times. These good motions should be followed without delay. As it is said, they that lay at the pool of Bethesda strove to get in so soon as ever the angel had stirred the water in John 5:4. And Joshua, so soon as God by a vision had stirred him up to search and find out the sin that had provoked God against Israel, in Joshua 7:16, went without delay immediately about it. So should we do in this case. When we feel God begins to soften our hearts and to stir up these good dispositions to devotion in us, then should we set ourselves seriously to this work of calling to mind our sins and bringing our hearts to sorrow for them. For (1) when God stirs up such motions, He knocks at the door of our hearts and shows Himself willing to enter in (Rev. 3:20). (2) Satan will be ready to quench the Spirit in these good motions. As it is said, he watched the infant to devour it so soon as ever it should be born (Rev. 12:4).

Thirdly, the days and times we set apart for fasting and prayer (upon whatsoever just occasion) are a most fit season for us to go about this work. For (1) we find God’s people have had their hearts wonderfully softened at such times. The Israelites in the fast that they kept for success against Benjamin came into the house of God and wept (Judg. 20:26). And in the fast they kept at Mizpeh they wept so abundantly that they are said in 1 Samuel 7:6 to have drawn water as by buckets

full out of their hearts and to have poured it out before the Lord. (2) This exercise of a religious fast is a great help and furtherance to this work. As we see here in David's example, "I humbled myself with fasting" (Ps. 35:13), and, "I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting" (Ps. 69:10).

Fourthly, when any judgments of God lie heavy upon ourselves or our brethren, that is a fit season to go about this work. When these men were in misery, David fell here to afflicting of his soul (Ps. 35:13). For (1) the Lord by every one of His judgments does testify from heaven that He has matter against us, as Naomi says in Ruth 1:21, "Why do you call me Naomi, seeing the LORD"—by "taking away my husband and my children—hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?"

(2) God by His judgments does call upon us to examine our ways and humble ourselves before Him. "Now therefore, saith the LORD of Hosts, consider your ways; ye have sown much, and brought in little, thus saith the LORD of Hosts, consider your ways" (Hag. 1:5–7); and, "In that day did the Lord GOD of Hosts call to weeping, and to mourning" (Isa. 22:12).

(3) God by His judgments softens the hearts of men and works in them more remorse, more proneness and aptness to repent than at other times. "God maketh my heart soft," says Job, "and the Almighty troubleth me" (Job 23:16). A man shall find himself fitter to pray then than at other times. And we should take the advantage and opportunity of this time for it, as James 5:13 says, "Is any afflicted? Let him pray." This has been oft seen even in many notable hypocrites who (however profane their hearts have been at other times) yet in their affliction have found in themselves a disposition to pray and to repent. "When he slew them then they sought him and returned" (Ps. 78:34); and, "LORD, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening

was upon them” (Isa. 26:16). And we find by experience that at such a time a faithful minister may much better work upon the hearts of men to bring them to remorse and repentance than at another time. According to that speech of Elihu in Job 33:22–24, “When a man’s soul draweth near to the grave; if there be then a messenger with him, an interpreter, one of a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness, then he is gracious unto him.” And so speaks David also in Psalm 94:12, “Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law.”

This is a singular favor of God, when correction and instruction go together. And herein we are bound to acknowledge the great mercy of God to our land, that (in the time of so general and grievous visitation as has been upon it) He has put it into the king’s heart to command so much preaching that thereby the hearts of the people might be effectually wrought upon, now the Lord has so by His judgment prepared them. And certainly if in such a time the word do not work upon men’s hearts, it will never do them good.

Fifthly and lastly, when we feel a secret pensiveness and sadness to come upon our hearts so as they even melt within us like ground that thaws after a frost, so as we could even weep abundantly, this is an excellent season and opportunity to bring our hearts unto godly sorrow in. For (1) sadness and heaviness make the heart more apt to be wrought to goodness. “Sorrow is better than laughter, for by the sadness of the countenance, the heart is made better” (Eccl. 7:3). (2) This is the way to turn the stream and current of our sorrow the right way, by making our sin our greatest sorrow (as indeed it ought to be) because it is the only just cause of all other our sorrows. “Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search, and try our ways and turn again unto the LORD” (Lam. 3:39–40).

Application. And surely (to conclude this first point) in this we have all cause to acknowledge our own folly and to be humbled for it and to impute that want of grace and ability that is in us to mourn for our sins unto this, that we have neglected these times and seasons whereby we might have been so much helped in this work.

We know the fittest seasons for the ploughing and breaking up of our ground, and we carefully observe them. But we know not or care not to observe the fittest seasons for the breaking up of the fallow ground of our hearts, which yet concerns us much more than the other does. “Break up your fallow ground,” says the prophet in Jeremiah 4:3, “and sow not among thorns.”

A Fit Place

The second thing we must do to work our hearts to godly sorrow is this: after we have made choice of a fit time to go about this work, we must also make a choice of a fit place for it, even such as wherein we may be most free from all distractions. For though this also be but a circumstance, yet may it yield us some help in all exercises of devotion. Christ bids us make a choice of a secret place for our private prayer in Matthew 6:6. And so He did Himself in Mark 1:35: “He went out, and departed into a solitary place and there prayed.” And, in Acts 10:9, Peter “went up to the top of the house to pray.” So though it be no shame for a man to weep for his sins as we have heard God’s people have done abundantly in their solemn fasts, yet is a solitary and secret place the fittest to work our hearts unto godly sorrow. “Commune with your own hearts upon your beds” in secret, says David in Psalm 4:4, “and be still.” In Isaiah 38:2–3, “Hezekiah turned his face to the wall when he prayed, and wept so sore.” And Jeremiah 13:17 says, “His soul should weep in secret.” And in Zechariah 12:12, it is

said they should mourn every family apart, the husband apart, and the wife apart. And Jeremiah, describing the man that is humbled under God's hand aright, says in Lamentations 3:28, "He sitteth alone, and keepeth silence."

Examine Our Hearts

Thirdly, when we have made choice of a fit time and a fit place also for this business, then must we examine our hearts seriously and impartially. And in this examination two things are to be performed by us: (1) we must labor to find out and call to mind our sins for which we should be humbled; (2) we must lay them to our hearts and so consider and weigh with ourselves the heinousness of them and aggravate them against ourselves that we may be affected with them.

Remember Past Sins

For the first, he that desires to have his heart humbled and to be able to mourn for his sins must labor by diligent search and examination to find out his sins and call them to mind and set them before his face. "Bring it again to mind oh ye transgressors," says the Lord in Isaiah 46:8. Let not man be afraid or unwilling to do this. To commit sin is dangerous and hurtful to your soul, but to call your sins to remembrance has no danger in it, will do you no hurt at all. To have an enemy or a mortal disease upon you is dangerous and hurtful, but to be aware of them may do you much good. Job knew this well and therefore prays earnestly to God to help him in this: "Make me to know my transgression, and my sin" (Job 13:23).

For (1) till then you can never truly mourn for your sin and repent of it. "No man repented himself of his wickedness, saying what have I done?" (Jer. 8:6). To know in general and in gross that you are a sinner will never humble you aright. You must know your sins in particular, or you can never truly

repent. This was that which humbled those three thousand mentioned in Acts 2:36–37 and pricked them at the heart. God made known to them their sin in particular, even that heinous sin of crucifying the Lord of life. (2) It is profitable for us in another respect. For the more careful we are to remember our sins and call them to mind, the more ready will the Lord be to forget them and cast them behind His back. This is plain by that prayer David makes in Psalm 51:1–3, “Have mercy upon me oh God, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, for I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.” But if you strive to forget them, never to think of them, to cast them behind your back, be you sure God will remember them and never have them out of His eye. “Thou hast,” says Moses in Psalm 90:8, “set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.”

Question. But you will say to me, “What sins should I call to mind? All? That is an endless work. I know not where to begin nor where to make an end. ‘They are more in number,’ says David in Psalm 40:12, ‘than the hairs of my head.’ How much more,” will you say, “are my sins innumerable?”

Answer. I answer (1) the more sins you can call to mind, the better it will be for you. This may we see in Ezekiel 20:43, where this is promised as a singular grace God would work in His people’s hearts: “You shall remember your ways, and all your doings, you have been defiled and ye shall loath yourselves in your own sight, for all your evils ye have committed.” Therefore, also when the Lord prescribes unto Aaron the course he should take in making an atonement between God and the people, He tells him in Leviticus 16:21 he must “confess over the live goat, all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, in all their sins.” And therefore it is good when you go about this work to take the help of the glass. Set the glass of God’s law before you and examine your

ways according unto it. “By the law cometh the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20).

(2) Secondly, take heed you do not in your examination willingly forget or pass by any sin, either (a) out of a conceit that it is but small—for God’s curse is due to the smallest (Deut. 27:26)—nor (b) out of favor you bear to it and loathness to leave it; for if thou regard iniquity in thine heart: the Lord will not regard thee (Ps. 66:18). And, “He that hideth his sin, shall not prosper” (Prov. 28:13).

(3) Thirdly and lastly, be you yet in this examination of yourself especially desirous and careful to call to mind the foulest and grossest of all your sins that ever you committed, though it were long ago. “Remember, and forget not how thou provokedst the LORD thy God to wrath in the wilderness” (Deut. 9:7). Thus did David in the exercising of himself unto repentance think oft of the sins of his youth. “Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions” (Ps. 25:7). So did Paul oft call to mind his foulest sins: “I was a blasphemer, and a persecutor” (1 Tim. 1:13). For the heart will sooner be brought to remorse and sorrow by remembrance of these than of smaller sins, which was the cause why the publicans and harlots, those great sinners, repented sooner than the civil Pharisees (Matt. 21:32).

Application. [It is] no hard matter for you that have been adulterers, blasphemers, persecutors, thieves, oppressors, drunkards to bring your hearts unto godly sorrow, if you would take but a little pains with them. You that have lived more civilly (as that rich young man had done, that concerning the commandments of the second table could say unto Christ in Matthew 19:20, “All these things have I kept from my youth up”) must take the more pains in this work.

Consider the Sinfulness of Sin

The second thing we must do in this examination of ourselves is this: when we have found out and called to mind our sins, then must we consider and weigh with ourselves the heinousness of them, aggravate them against ourselves, and lay them so to heart as we may be affected and moved to remorse and sorrow for them. Men are oft blamed for this, that they laid not their sins to their heart, considered not so of them as to be affected with them (Isa. 47:7). The Chaldeans are blamed that they did not lay to their hearts the oppressions they had done to God's people. And the Jews in Isaiah 57:11, that they laid not to heart their idolatry.

Now the way to lay them to our hearts is to consider well the heinousness of them and the circumstances whereby they are aggravated. Paul did use thus to aggravate his sins against himself: "I am less than the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8); "I am the chief of all sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15).

The circumstances whereby sin is aggravated are many. I will name a few of them. First, consider your sins have been committed against many and strong means of grace. Remember what Christ says in Matthew 11:24 to Capernaum because of this, "I say unto thee, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment than for thee." O consider with yourself that if the sins of Indians¹ and other barbarous people that never enjoyed any ordinary means of grace shall justly be punished in hellfire—as doubtless they shall, for "as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law," says the apostle in Romans 2:12. If the sins of infants do justly deserve damnation, as certainly they

1. The English East India Company, formed for trading with India and the East Indies, was incorporated in 1600. Hildersham's own son Nathanael was engaged in such trade. Thus, Hildersham would have been well aware of the paganism of the native Indians.

do—"death hath reigned," says he in Romans 5:14, "even over them that have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression," that is, not actually—what degree and measure of punishment and torment think you is most justly due to your sins that have been committed against such means of grace as you have enjoyed?

Secondly, your sins have not been committed upon ignorance but against your knowledge. And if the elect Jews were so pricked in their heart for the sin they committed ignorantly (Acts 3:17), how much more cause have you? Remember what Christ says of this circumstance in Luke 12:47, "That servant which knew his lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes."

Thirdly, how voluntarily you have sinned, how weak and light the temptations have often been that have drawn you to it, nay, how you have drawn and provoked yourself to it. And say you to your own heart, "If God were so much offended with Ahab, though he had so strong a tempter as Jezebel, his wife (1 Kings 21:25), alas, what cause has He to be offended with me, that have been mine own tempter?" Remember what the Holy Ghost speaks of this circumstance in Isaiah 33:1, "Woe to thee that spoilest, and wast not spoiled," and, "Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope" (5:18).

Fourthly, the infinite number of your sins. Say they were in their own nature never so small, yet the number of them and your multiplying of them so oft makes the burden of them intolerable. Consider how the Lord aggravates sin by this circumstance. "A lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evening shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities, every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces; because their transgressions are many, and their backslidings increased" (Jer. 5:6). See what weight this

very circumstance gave unto David's sin in the sense of his conscience. "Mine iniquities," says he in Psalm 40:12, "are more than the hairs of mine head, therefore mine heart faileth me." The sands, though taken severally they be very small, yet many heaped together will make an intolerable burden. In Job 6:3, Job says his grief "was heavier than the sand of the sea." "If for one sin Adam was so terrified that he fled from God in Genesis 3:8, what cause of terror have I?" may you well say to your own soul.

Fifthly, how oft you have relapsed and fallen back again into the same sin that your heart has smitten you for, and you have repented of and covenanted with God that you would forsake it, returning with the dog to that you have loathed and vomited up (2 Peter 2:22). An arm once broken cannot be cured without pain; but if often, the cure will be more dangerous and painful. If you had broken your promises and covenants with men, you would count it a matter of infamy and shame unto you. What cause of shame is it then that you have broken your promises unto God? See also how this circumstance aggravates sin in Ecclesiastes 5:4: "When thou vowest a vow unto God defer not to pay it, for he hath no pleasure in fools."

Sixthly, how you have by your sin corrupted others, whereof it may be some are in hell already, and some in the way to hell, and you cannot draw them unto repentance. Indeed, if you can truly repent, this shall not hinder your salvation that you have been a means of damning others, for so was Paul (Acts 26:11). Yet must it needs be a heartbreaking to you, whenever you do seriously think of it all the days of your life—and so was it unto Paul. If you had been the means to undo another in his outward estate, much more if you had taken away his life, it would be a just cause of heaviness to you. How much more cause of humbling is it that you have been a means of destroying the soul of any? "Woe to the man by whom the

offence cometh" (Matt. 18:7). "They are brass and iron, they are corrupters" (Jer. 6:28).

Seventhly, consider the person against whom you have sinned: "Against thee, thee only have I sinned" (Ps. 51:4). And consider the Lord (1) in His greatness and excellency of power and justice. "If one man sin against another," says Eli to his sons, "the Lord shall judge him, but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall entreat for him?" (1 Sam. 2:25). (2) But especially in His goodness toward yourself. Consider that that God whom you have offended, you do not only live by (Acts 17:28) but also He is of that gracious disposition that notwithstanding all your rebellions He would not have you perish. For (a) He is apt to forgive you upon your repentance (Isa. 55:7). (b) He has promised a general pardon and not excluded you (John 3:16), but will have it offered unto you (Mark 16:15). (c) He seeks to you to be reconciled (2 Cor. 5:20). (d) He has done much more for you. He loves thee with the love of a father—for to such especially I speak—"and thou hast received the Spirit of adoption, whereby thou art able to cry, Abba Father" (Rom. 8:15). Consider well of this, and it will have more force to mollify your heart than anything else in the world.

The sense of our desperate estate without this may make us roar and rave and rage against the Lord, "like a wild bull in a net," as the prophet speaks in Isaiah 51:20. But nothing will humble the heart so kindly nor make it melt in godly sorrow as the true consideration of this love of God. "There is forgiveness with thee: that thou mayest be feared" (Ps. 130:4). It was not the crowing of the cock twice that made Peter's heart melt, but the gracious look that Christ cast upon him in Luke 22:61–62: "The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter, then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, and Peter went out, and wept bitterly." This was that which wrought upon the heart of the prodigal in Luke 15:18: "I will arise, and go to my

father, and I will say, Father I have sinned.” And so must you say to your own heart, if ever you would have it to melt, and your eyes shed tears for your sins, “It is my Father, my Father that I have so offended.” Say to it as Moses does to the Jews in Deuteronomy 32:6, “Have I thus requited the LORD, O foolish and ungracious wretch that I am? Is He not my father? Has He not made me and established me?”

Fervent Prayer

The fourth and last thing we must do to bring our hearts unto this godly sorrow is fervent prayer. For you must:

Complain to God of the hardness of your heart, as in Isaiah 63:17, “O LORD, why hast thou hardened my heart from thy fear?”

Beg this grace of Him and cry to Him for it. That which the apostle says of wisdom may be said of this grace also: “If any of you lack a soft heart, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him” (James 1:5).

Challenge Him with His promise and (in a holy reverence) charge Him with that covenant mentioned in Ezekiel 36:26: “I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.” And Zechariah 12:10, “I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace, and of supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one that mourneth for his only son, and be in bitterness for his firstborn.”

Be importunate in this suit as one that will take no “nay,” nor give it over till you have obtained it, as David in Psalm 27:4 and the woman of Canaan in Matthew 15:27.

Wait for an answer, and pray still. Limit not the Lord His time. “We ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1).

Consider how oft the Lord called upon you before you did answer Him, and how long He waited for you. “All the day long have I stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient, and gainsaying people” (Rom. 10:21). Remember that promise in Isaiah 49:23: “They shall not be ashamed”—or, disappointed—“that wait for me.”

SERMON 8

August 2, 1626

*I*t follows now that we proceed to show you the signs and notes whereby we may be able to discern whether we have been yet rightly humbled for our sins; whether that sorrow for sin that we have felt in ourselves be unfeigned, yea or no; whether it be that saving sorrow of God's elect unto which all these promises of comfort and mercy that we have heard of do belong.¹ And surely it is a matter of great use and necessity to have notes given us out of God's Word to try our humiliation and sorrow for sin by.

First, because as it is certain our sins are not pardoned unless we have truly repented of them—"Christ giveth repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31)—so is it as certain we never truly repented of our sins, if we have not unfeignedly sorrowed and mourned for them. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation" (2 Cor. 7:10). We must be made (though not equal, yet) "conformable" to Christ "in his death and passion," as the apostle speaks in Philippians 3:10, or we shall never reign with Him. "This is a faithful

1. This sermon comes eight months after sermon 7. The 1625 fast had officially concluded in January 1626, but a further (less serious) outbreak of plague in the summer of 1626 had led to the calling of another national fast.

saying,” says the apostle in 2 Timothy 2:11–12, “if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him, if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.” And this was a chief part of His passion wherein we must be conformable unto Him. When He suffered for our sins, “he began to be sorrowful, and very heavy” (Matt. 26:37), insomuch as He could not contain but needs must acquaint His three disciples with it. “Then saith he unto them, my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” (v. 38). When He suffered for our sins, He wept abundantly, as the apostle says in Hebrews 5:7, “He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears.” We cannot sorrow and weep in that measure as He did for our sins, but we must sorrow in our measure as He did. We must be made conformable to Him in His passion as you have heard, or we shall never have part in Him. We must either mourn as Peter did with a saving sorrow in Matthew 26:75, or we shall mourn as Judas did with a desperate sorrow in Matthew 27:3, 5. We must either now in this life mourn for our sins (as we have heard all God’s servants have done), or we shall certainly hereafter “cry for sorrow of heart,” as the prophet speaks in Isaiah 65:14, “and howl for vexation of spirit” in hell where shall be nothing but “weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth,” as our Savior speaks in Luke 13:28, “where their worm never dieth,” and the fire never shall be quenched (Mark 9:44).

Secondly, because men are very apt to be deceived in this point and to think they have been rightly humbled and have rightly sorrowed for their sins when indeed they have not. We read of the hypocrites’ expostulation with God in Isaiah 58:3: they had afflicted their souls, and God took no knowledge of it. And Zechariah 7:3, 5, they had mourned, and wept in their fasts. And the Lord says of them they had not done it unto Him; they had their own ends in it. Yea, it is certain many hypocrites do indeed mourn and are exceedingly humbled sometimes.

You know the Lord gives this testimony of Ahab himself, that he was humbled, in 1 Kings 21:29. And yet as good never a whit as never the better, their sorrow and humiliation is to no purpose at all, because it is not sound and sincere.

Thirdly, because many of God's children that are indeed true mourners are apt to doubt of themselves and to complain their hearts are so hard that they cannot mourn for their sins. O if they had soft and melting hearts that they could sorrow, that they could weep for sin, they were in a happy case, but (alas) they cannot.

Thus God's church and people complain unto God in Isaiah 63:17, "O LORD, why hast thou hardened our hearts?" Seeing therefore it is as you see (in these three respects) a matter of so great necessity to have a sure direction given us out of God's Word how to discern that humiliation of soul and sorrow for sin that is sincere and saving from that which is counterfeit, I will give you some principal notes of differences, between them whereby they may be judged of. And these are to be referred to four heads. The first is from the object of our sorrow and humiliation—the thing, the matter that we are grieved and humbled for. The second from the measure and degree of our sorrow. The third from the cause that breeds it in us and fountain from whence it flows. The fourth and last, from the effects and fruits that proceed from it.

For the first, if we desire to know whether we were ever yet rightly humbled or whether we do still remain in the hardness and impenitency of our hearts, we must examine what it is that has troubled us and made us to mourn.

Sorrowing for the Evil of Sin

First, he that is truly humbled mourns for the evil of sin rather than for the evil of punishment. It is no ill sign to mourn and to be humbled under the judgments of God. Nay, it is our duty

to be so; and a passing ill sign it is of an ungracious heart not to be affected with the judgments of God, not to be troubled when the Lord shows Himself to be angry with us.

The prophet complains of this as of a great sin in Jeremiah 5:3, "O LORD, thou hast stricken them and they have not grieved." It is said of God's people in Ezra 10:9 that they "trembled because of the great rain." And David and the elders of Israel humbled themselves greatly for the plague that God sent upon the land in 2 Samuel 24:17. And so did Jehoshaphat, when God threatened an invasion in 2 Chronicles 20:3. When the state and government of the kingdom of Israel in the days of Saul was so broken and out of order, had so many breaches in it that it did even shake and totter as ready to fall and come to ruin, as the prophet complains in Psalm 60:2, God's people were so troubled with the sensible token of God's displeasure that they were even astonished with it. "Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment," as the prophet speaks in verse 3. And certainly this is a dangerous sign that our people generally are given up of God to a marvelous hardness of heart, that the Lord having by all these tokens of His anger "called us to weeping and to mourning," as the prophet speaks in Isaiah 22:12, we have been generally given to as much jollity in these times as ever we were. "Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you, till you die, saith the Lord GOD of Hosts," as it follows there in verse 14. Yet, though it be a good thing to be humbled under God's judgments, this is not enough to prove our humiliation to be sound and sincere. Many a hypocrite has gone so far. Thus far Ahab went. O how he was humbled at the hearing of that fearful judgment that God threatened by the prophet to bring upon him and his house. "Seest thou how Ahab humblest himself?" (1 Kings 21:29). Thus far Jehoram, his son and as bad a man almost as he, went. When a grievous famine was upon the land, he greatly humbled himself; for

though he were a king, he wore sackcloth not as his upper garment as the manner was to express their humiliation outwardly, but secretly next [to] his skin in 2 Kings 6:30. See how far a hypocrite may go in humbling himself under God's judgments. But the true repentant, though he is humbled for and can mourn for God's judgments, yet that is neither the only nor the chief cause of his sorrow. His sins that have provoked God to those judgments trouble him most. "I will declare mine iniquities," says David in Psalm 38:18, "and be sorry for my sin." And in Ezekiel 7:16, "They shall be on the mountains like the doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every man for his iniquity." Yea, even when God's judgments do press and humble him most, yet he is more troubled for his sin than for the affliction that is upon him, as we shall see in that prayer of David in Psalm 25:18, "Look upon my affliction, and my pain, and forgive all my sins." And so it is said of God's people in Ezra's time. When the Lord, by a judgment of immoderate rain, had testified His displeasure against them, they "trembled because of this matter"—their sin in marrying idolaters—"and for the great rain" (Ezra 10:9). Their sin was the chief thing they trembled for.

Application. Let us then examine our sorrow by this first note. Alas, many bless themselves in this that they have been much given to sorrow and heaviness.

"If sorrow be good," says many a one, "I have had enough of that." Yea, upon this they ground their hope that they shall escape the wrath to come—because they have endured so much sorrow in this life. "I have had my punishment in this life," says he. Alas, poor wretch, of all your sorrows that you have endured, I may say as our Savior does in another case in Matthew 24:8, "All these are but the beginning of sorrows." Worldly sorrows are but the beginning of hellish sorrows. "The devils also believe and tremble" after this sort, as the apostle

speaks in James 2:19. They are troubled exceedingly (more than ever you could be) with the apprehension and sense of the punishment which they undoubtedly believe is prepared for them.

Many of you are troubled with sadness and heaviness of heart and can say as in Job 23:16, "God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me." O that you could turn the stream of your sorrow the right way from sorrowing for your affliction to sorrowing for your sin. One hour spent in sorrowing for your sin will yield you more true comfort than a thousand spent in sorrowing for your affliction will do.

And we all now assembled to profess our humiliation for the manifold tokens of God's anger upon His church and this land must examine the truth of our hearts in this, whether we can as well mourn for the sins of the land as for the judgments of God that are upon it and are threatened against it. See a notable example of this in Nehemiah 1, when he heard of the great affliction and reproach God's people were in at Jerusalem (v. 3). "How the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, and the gates thereof burnt with fire, he sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven," as he says in verse 4. But what is it that most humbled and troubled his heart in this his fast? Surely, not so much the judgment whereby God had showed Himself to be angry with them, as their sins whereby they had made Him angry, as you shall see in verses 6 and 7. And surely the sins of the land ought to trouble us more than any of the judgments either present or imminent (though they be very great and fearful).

For (1) they give us cause to fear far heavier than these be, and God has said of England as He said once of the kingdom of Judah, "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more" (Ezek. 21:27).

(2) If it were not for the sins of the land, these judgments would vanish or do us no hurt at all. “The sting of death is sin” (1 Cor. 15:56). And of one sin, the sin of idolatry (especially being openly committed, and, alas, our land stands guilty of that and many more), it is said in Exodus 32:25, “Moses saw”—though every blind fool could not see it—“that the people were naked, for Aaron had made them naked to their shame before their enemies.” Alas, the sins of the land make us naked to our enemies abroad and to our treacherous and bloody papists at home.² Do what we can to defend and arm ourselves, till our sins be repented of, till they be removed we shall be found to be a naked people. We cannot stand before our enemies, till the accursed thing (till Achan, Joshua 7:13) be taken away, and, alas, we have many Achans among us. So many of you therefore as have hearts that can mourn, that can be humbled, mourn for the sins of the land and by the first note approve unto God and to your own hearts the truth of your humiliation that you profess this day. And so much for the first note.

Sorrowing for Sin against God Himself

Secondly, he that is truly humbled mourns for sin not so much in respect to himself, of the hurt and danger that his sin brings upon himself, as in respect to God, because He is offended and dishonored by his sin. Saving sorrow is therefore called in 2 Corinthians 7:10 “godly sorrow,” *κατα θεον λυπη*, sorrow that respects God and is opposed to worldly sorrow that respects only the crosses and miseries that sin makes us subject unto.

2. There was a great fear of Catholic plots and influences in England at this time. Charles had sought a Spanish Catholic bride and then, in 1625, had married the French Catholic princess Henrietta Maria.

I grant it is not unlawful to be troubled for sin, even out of respect to the punishment and misery that it will bring upon us. As a man may have respect to this in his fear that keeps him from committing sin, so may he also in his sorrow for it after it is committed. Job gives this for a reason why he durst not sin: “For destruction from God,” says he in Job 31:23, “was a terror to me.” And so does Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:11: “Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.”

Sound and saving humiliation for sin uses to begin in this legal compunction and terror, which has respect only to the misery that sin brings us to. And not one of a hundred do ever come to mourn for sin in respect to God, till they have first learned to mourn for sin in respect to themselves. This prepares, makes way for, and draws in the other, as the prick of a needle does the thread. So it is said of those three thousand that were converted by Peter in Acts 2:37, “that they were” first “pricked in their hearts”—that is, with this legal sorrow and fear. But though this be a lawful and good thing to mourn and be troubled for sin, even in respect of the misery it makes us obnoxious unto, yet is not this sufficient to prove our humiliation and sorrow for sin to be sound and sincere, for many a hypocrite has gone so far. They have been greatly humbled and troubled for their sins. O how Pharaoh complained and cried out of his sin in Exodus 9:27: “He saith to Moses and Aaron, I have sinned, the LORD is righteous and I and my people are wicked.” And so did Judas in Matthew 27:3–4: “He repented himself, and cried out,” saying, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood.” Did not these men mourn for their sins, think you? Yes, that they did; but it was not out of any respect to God, whom they had offended, but only out of respect to themselves and the hurt they had done themselves thereby, as appears plainly in their stories.

Now the true repentant, though he be humbled for his sin in respect to himself and the danger and hurt that he fears his sin will do him, yet he rests not there; but he is also humbled for his sin in respect to God, and chiefly because he has offended and dishonored God by his sin. This was that which troubled David most in Psalm 51:4: “Against thee, thee only have I sinned.” When God had threatened heavy things against him, to God he cries (not as Pharaoh in Exodus 10:17, “Take away from me this death” only), but as 2 Samuel 24:10, “I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant.” Yea, he was well content to bear that punishment, so his sin might be pardoned, that he might have God’s favor. See verse 17, “Let thy hand I pray thee be against me, and my father’s house.” The punishment that his sin has brought or is likely to bring upon him troubles the true penitent nothing so much as the offending of God and loss of His favor. “He lamenteth after the LORD,” as it is said God’s people did in 1 Samuel 7:2. And as he mourns for his sin in respect to God more than to the punishment of his sin, so does he joy and take more comfort in the assurance of the pardon of his sin than in deliverance from any judgment whatsoever. This is the thing that David gloried in, in Psalm 32:5: “Thou forgavest”—not “the punishment,” as the old translation³ reads, but—“the iniquity of my sin.”

Application. O let us examine ourselves by this second note, whether we have sorrowed for our sins in respect unto God or to ourselves only. Your sins do trouble you because you know they deserve hell and damnation. You know they deserve God’s curse in your children, in your estate, in everything you take in hand. You do well in this. But if this be the only thing or the chief thing that makes your sin such a burden

3. The English Geneva Bible, first published in 1560.

to your heart, you have not yet repented aright. When those that heard Peter, in Acts 2:37, were pricked in their hearts with these legal sorrows and asked him what they should do to come to comfort, he bade them repent, as if he had said, “This is a good preparative, but this is not repentance.”

This is a chief note of sincerity in every grace, and so in this, when we do that which God requires, when we mourn for our sins in respect unto God and not to ourselves. Thus, God upbraids the hypocrites in Zechariah 7:5: “When ye fasted and mourned, did ye it at all to me, even to me?” And Romans 14:6, “He that regardeth a day, regardeth it unto the Lord.” I will give you therefore three other notes to try this by, whether your sorrow for sin be in respect to the Lord because you have offended and dishonored Him, or no:

First, then your sins will trouble you as well in the days of health and prosperity as in sickness and affliction, else you do no more than a hypocrite may do. For it is said of the wicked Israelites in Psalm 78:34, “When he slew them, then they sought him, and returned and inquired early after God.”

Secondly, then you will be troubled for one sin as well as for another, for everything you know to be a sin, for God is offended and dishonored by one as well as by another. “Whosoever shall keep the whole law,” says the apostle in James 2:10, “and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” I do not say we should be troubled so much for one sin as for another, for God in His law has put a difference between sins. And as some duties that God requires of us, so some sins are weightier than others (see Matthew 23:23, where judgment, mercy, and fidelity are called by our Savior the “weightier matters of the law”; and it is made there the note of a hypocrite to be more troubled for small sins than for great—“to strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel” [v. 24]).

But this is also certain, that he that is troubled for sin because it is sin in respect unto God, because He is offended and dishonored by it, will be troubled for one sin as well as for another. So shall we find David was humbled not for his adultery and murder only, but for all his sins in Psalm 51:9, "Hide thy face from my sins; and blot out all mine iniquities."

The apostle, speaking in 1 Corinthians 11:31 of the loose performing of spiritual duties, of coming to the Sacrament without due preparation, says we must judge ourselves even for that. And [he] says that even for this sin God struck many with sickness and mortality. Because they would not judge themselves for such sins, God did judge them (v. 30). David's heart smote him even for cutting off the lap of Saul's garment in 1 Samuel 24:5. When Saul counted the sparing of Agag and of the fattest of the cattle (especially for sacrifice) but a matter of nothing, Samuel tells him, "Disobedience to God is as bad as witchcraft and idolatry" (1 Sam. 15:23). O therefore know you are not troubled for any sin in respect to God, if your very unprofitableness, idleness, peevishness, inconstancy, playing fast and loose with God do not trouble you.

Yea, the man whose heart is truly humbled for sin is conscious of the sinful depravity of his nature and is humbled for that (which is the root) as much if not much more than for his actual sins, which are the fruits of it. "All sins that defile a man, come from within from this fountain" (Mark 7:23). David was humbled for this in Psalm 51:5: "Behold I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me." And so Paul, though he lived a most innocent life, even before his calling to Christ (see Philippians 3:6), yet see how he was troubled even for this in Romans 7:14, 24.

Thirdly, if you be humbled for your sin out of respect to God, because God is offended and dishonored by it, then will you be able to mourn for the sins of other men, for God is as

well offended and dishonored by them as by your own. (1) I showed you before that the man that is truly humbled for the judgments of God upon this land will mourn more for the sins of the land than for the judgments themselves. So must we (2) be able to mourn for the sins of the places and towns we dwell in, especially if they be of note for religion. This is prescribed as a duty in 1 Corinthians 5:2. You should have “mourned, that he that hath done this deed, might be taken away.” This is commended by the Holy Ghost as a great virtue and grace in Lot, that “in seeing and hearing, he vexed his righteous soul from day to day, with the unlawful deeds of the Sodomites” (2 Peter 2:8). This has a great promise of special protection in the days of common calamity. “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem,” says the Lord to the man clothed in linen, with the writer’s inkhorn by his side, in Ezekiel 9:4, “and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.” (3) For the sins especially of our own families, for they should trouble us most. Nehemiah in his fast complained chiefly of his own and of the sins of his father’s house (Neh. 1:6). And it is said that when God should “pour the spirit of grace and supplications” upon His people, they should “mourn every family apart” (Zech. 12:[10,] 12). And Job, even out of the fear that his sons in their feasting might have sinned, offered burnt offerings (which were always accompanied with profession of humiliation) for them in Job 1:5.

Application. Certainly, he that cares not how much lewdness there be in the town where he lives nor in his own family and that is not unfeignedly troubled for it nor endeavors to reform it was never yet rightly humbled for any sin of his own.

