

T H E
AMERICAN PREACHER;

OR, A

COLLECTION OF SERMONS

FROM SOME OF THE

MOST EMINENT PREACHERS,

NOW LIVING,

IN THE UNITED STATES,

OF

DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS

IN THE

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.

VOLUME III.

ELIZABETH-TOWN, (NEW-JERSEY)

PRINTED BY SHEPARD KOLLOCK, FOR THE EDITORS,
WHO HOLD THE PRIVILEGE OF COPY-RIGHT.

M.DCC.XCI.

S E R M O N LII.

TRUST IN GOD.

B Y

JOHN WITHERSPOON, D. D. L. L. D.

Col. N. C. P.

ISAIAH I. 10.

Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darknes, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

HAVING, in a former discourse, opened the character and state of those who are called upon, and exhorted to trust in the name of the Lord, and entered upon the *second thing* proposed; which was to explain the duty of trust in God, and to point out its foundation; and having in this view considered the nature of absolute promises—
I proceed,

2. To consider the nature and use of *conditional* promises. These I am obliged, for greater distinctness, to divide into three different heads.—1. There are promises made to persons of such or

such a character, or in such or such a state.—2. There are promises, the performance of which is suspended on our compliance with something previously required, as the condition of obtaining them.—3. There are promises, not only suspended on both the preceding terms, but upon the supposition of some circumstances in themselves uncertain, or to us unknown. Let us consider each of these with care and attention.

1. There are promises made to persons of such or such a character, or in such or such a state, which are, therefore, to be applied, and rested on, according as the evidence of our being of this character, or in this state, is clear or obscure. In this I have particularly in view, the blessings of salvation, the pardon of sin, peace with God, the spirit of sanctification, and a right to everlasting life. These all lie in an unbroken chain, and inseparable connexion, and might have been more briefly expressed, by an interest in Christ the Saviour, who is the author, source and sum of these blessings; *for all the promises of God in him, are yea, and in him amen, to the glory of God by us.* Let no judicious attentive hearer be surpris'd or dissatisfied, that I have ranked these among conditional promises, for you may observe that I have expressed myself thus, they are promises made to persons of such or such a character, or in such or such a state. In this, they certainly differ from the promises properly *absolute*, mentioned above. It is

far from my intention to do injury to that fundamental truth, that salvation is by grace. I esteem that doctrine which proceeds upon a self-righteous system, to be contrary to the word of God, and most pernicious to the souls of men. There is nothing at all required in scripture to be performed by us, as a purchasing or meriting condition. Every gracious act of the divine government, in our favor, is the fruit of the Redeemer's purchase, and every holy disposition wrought in us, is the effect of his Almighty Grace. But it is certain at the same time, that in order to our accepting those blessings, we must be truly and deeply humbled, and see ourselves to be incapable and helpless. We must be unfeignedly willing to renounce all claim of merit, and accept of salvation as it is offered in the gospel; that is, in its full extent, and in the free and sovereign manner of its communication. So far, surely, we must say, the promises of the gospel are conditional, or wholly pervert the word of God. I know of no promises then to the unbelieving and impenitent, unless you call that a promise, that they shall have *their portion in the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone; and that the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.*

Hear it, my dear brethren, it is the *needy, thirsty, sensible* soul that is invited to come and find rest. *Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come*

buy wine and milk without money and without price. Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. If any shall think fit further to say, that the very destination of the vessels of mercy, is of God's sovereign pleasure, that conviction itself is by a day of his power, and that faith which interests us in Christ's righteousness is his gift: I agree to the whole, but observe, that it is improperly introduced here. No use can possibly be made of the divine decree in the application of the promises. It is inverting the order of things. Can any man say, I trust in the mercy of God, because I have been ordained to everlasting life? No man can derive comfort from this, till by his effectual calling it is published, and begins to be accomplished; and then he may look back with wonder and gratitude to that everlasting love, by which he was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Can you judge of the fruit of a tree by looking upon the root? No, but you judge of the strength and deepness of the root, by the fulness of the fruit, and the vigor and verdure of the branches. From an improper mixture of what belongs to the secret will of God, and what belongs to us, as our duty, much error and confusion arises,

Now, my brethren, as to the application of these promises of pardon and peace, the humbled sinner, the man among us, who walketh in darkness and hath no light—who is burdened with a sense

of guilt, and discouraged by the threatenings of the law, the accusations of conscience, and the pure and holy nature of God; who, perhaps, has all this aggravated by distress and trouble, is called to trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God. He is invited to consider and rest on the extent of the call, the immutability of the promise, and the riches of divine grace. If he is so far from pleading any merit in himself, or being dissatisfied with the plan of salvation laid down in the gospel, that he is making every thing an argument against himself, and dare not lay hold of, or appropriate so unspeakable a mercy: This is just the effect of distrust, and he is called, in the strongest manner, in the text, to *trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.* With how many gracious assurances for this purpose is the scripture filled. John vi. 37. *All that the Father hath given me shall come to me, and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.* Heb. vii. 25. *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.* Rev. xxii. 17. *And the spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.* All things, Christ excepted, are to be renounced to the all-sufficiency of a Redeemer, to be the foundation of our hope. The penitent will say with the apostle. Phil. iii. 8. *Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus*

my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, even the righteousness which is of God by faith:

2. There is a second class of promises, the performance of which is suspended on our previous compliance with something required as the condition of obtaining them. In these we are not only called to *accept of the divine mercy, but commanded to obey the divine will.* The order in which I have placed these, will, I hope, prevent you from misunderstanding or misapplying what may be said on them. This class includes all the promises in scripture regarding the daily progress of a believer in his sanctification and conformity to God, as well as the increase of his comfort and peace. I am sensible, that as the reconciliation of a sinner to God, and his right to what is called in scripture *the promise* of eternal life, is of free and unmerited mercy, so, no doubt, all the inferior or subordinate promises flow from the same source, nay, in a certain measure, they are entirely upon the same footing with those formerly mentioned; that is to say, final perseverance, real growth in the spiritual life, and necessary comfort, are the sure and purchased portion of every one that is born of God. Rom. viii. 29. *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many*

brethren. But in the distribution of those gifts, particularly in their measure, there is not only an unknown regard to the good pleasure of God, but a known and established regard to our conduct in duty. Thus the abundant supply of the spirit is the fruit and return of diligence in prayer. Matt. vii. 7. *Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.* See also Ezekiel xxxvi. 25. compared with the 37th. *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness; and from all your idols will I cleanse you, &c.* Thus saith the Lord, yet for all this will I be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them. Thus also inward consolation as well as outward security, is expressly promised as the effect and reward of uniformity and diligence in duty. Isa. xxxii. 17. *And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.* As the counterpart and illustration of this, you see, that a departure from the path of duty brings on the threatened, or, perhaps, I ought to call it, the promised rod of correction. Ps. lxxxix. 30—33. *But if his children shall forsake my law, and not walk in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with a rod, and their iniquities with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.* In the same manner, Isa. xl. 30, 31. *Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon*

the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary—they shall walk and not faint. Agreeably to all this, you know, our blessed Lord prescribed watchfulness and prayer as the great preservatives against temptation, and whoever expects either spiritual strength, or comfort, while he relaxes his diligence in the way of duty, is guilty of that sin, which is called in scripture, tempting God; and shall assuredly meet with a dreadful disappointment.

My brethren, as much of the daily exercise of real believers regards their progress in sanctification and their peace and comfort, it is proper that you should carefully attend to the tenor of these promises, and to what ought to be your reliance upon them. I shall sum up, in a few particulars, what I apprehend to be of most importance.

1. Trust in these promises implies self-denial, and a deep sense of your own weakness. These promises would be unnecessary and superfluous were we not insufficient of ourselves for any thing that is good. Trust in God stands directly opposed to all self-dependance. Prov. iii. 5. *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding.* How jealous God is, if I may speak so, of the honor that is due to him in this respect, may be seen from the many foul and shameful crimes into which he permitted some of his best saints to fall, when they were off their guard, by

loth, or still more provoked him by pride and presumption. Noah's drunkenness, Moses's passion, David's adultery and murder, and Peter's denial of his master. 1 Cor. x. 11. 12. *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.* For this reason the apostle Paul says with great propriety, and with great force, which is equally applicable to himself and other believers, a seeming paradox. 1 Cor. xii. 10. *For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

2. As we are to put no trust in ourselves, so we are to exercise the most unshaken confidence of our being able to discharge any duty or undergo any trial by the help of the Almighty.—Oh! how ready are we to sin on both hands? How often do we presume upon our own strength and forget the necessity of applying for divine aid?—And on the other hand, how prone are we to timidity or despondence in difficult cases? When corruptions have long kept their ground, we are ready to dread their influence, and to make but little out of the promises in scripture, that we shall be made *more than conquerors through him that loved us.* We have learned, by sad experience, that in us dwelleth no good thing, and yet it is long before we will attend to the lesson that follows hard upon it, *My grace is sufficient for thee, and my strength shall be made perfect in weakness.*

3. As these promises are exprelsly made to the diligent, you must still remember that your own attention and application to duty is essentially necessary, and that the assistance promised from on high, is always represented in scripture as an argument and encouragement to diligence, and not a warrant or excuse for sloth. Phillip. ii. 12.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. It is also well worthy of notice, that the same prophet Ezekiel, who says, chap. xxxvi. 26. *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you,* changes the form of his expression; and in another place, chap. xviii. 31, 32. speaks in the following terms; *Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.* In consequence of this,

4. In the last place, trust in God will make us ready to acknowledge, that when we fail in duty, when we forget or break our resolutions, the fault is certainly in ourselves. It is impossible to excuse or justify ourselves in any degree, without laying the blame, in the same proportion, upon God, and calling in question his faithfulness and truth. But whatever our treacherous hearts may sinfully suggest, we are not straitened in God, but straitened in our own bowels. We find him

pleading his own cause, in this respect, in many passages of scripture. Isa. lix. 1. *Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that he cannot hear; but your sins have separated between you and your God, and your iniquities have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.* Upon the whole, trust in these promises is no other than an humble and diligent application to duty, under a deep sense of weakness, and dependance on promised strength, accompanied with a firm persuasion, that *in the name of the Lord we shall tread down our enemies*, and go on from strength to strength, till we appear before God in Zion.

3. Another class of promises are those that are suspended, not only on the same conditions with the two former, but upon some other circumstances in themselves uncertain, or to us unseen. These are temporal mercies, or rather temporal prosperity, deliverance from present distress, and abundance or affluence of outward enjoyments. Perhaps we may also add spiritual consolation, and sensible joy in God. I find no temporal promise precisely fixed to the servant of God but this: *Bread shall be given him, and his water shall be sure;* and it is certainly his duty, in the most straitening circumstances, to maintain a confident dependance on the power and wisdom of Providence for necessary supply. I do not condemn those who, when reduced to extremity, have actually pleaded this divine promise, and against hope,

have believed in hope; and I am persuaded instances have not been wanting of relief, furnished in a manner next to miraculous. But as to every other degree of temporal prosperity, God hath reserved it in his own hand to give or withhold it at his pleasure, that is, as he sees it will be most for his glory, and the benefit of his people. It is lawful then, my brethren, for you to endeavor to procure, by honest industry, the increase of your substance, to look well to the state of your flocks and your herds, and to ask by prayer the blessing of God upon your labors. It is lawful, and it is your duty by regularity and care, to preserve life and health, as well as to ask of the Father of your Spirits, recovery from sickness, or deliverance from any other kind of distress. But you are not warranted to believe that these petitions shall be granted in hand, or in your own time and measure; even though you ask them in sincerity with the prayer of faith. There may be reasons for withholding them, and yet you may be accepted in your prayers. An infinitely wise God knows best what is for your good, and he only hath a right to determine in what part of his own service; where and how long he shall employ you. Trust in God, therefore, in this respect, implies a careful attention to the tenor of the promises with regard to temporal mercies, and not to look for, or even, if possible, desire what he hath not promised to bestow.

If I am not mistaken, we shall find it of moment, upon this subject, to observe, both what he hath not

and what he hath certainly promised. He has nowhere promised that his own people shall be the richest or the greatest on earth; but he hath certainly promised to bless their provision; and assured them that a little that a just man hath, shall be better than the riches of many wicked. He has not promised that they shall be free from suffering; but he hath certainly promised to support them by his own presence under their distress.

Isa. xliii. 2. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

The truth is, he hath promised that *all things shall work together for their good*. In one word, they have indeed all mercies promised, only they themselves are not in a condition, at present, to judge what they may use with safety, and what not. As the heir of an opulent estate, though he is proprietor of all, yet is laid under restraint while in infancy and nonage; because he would soon ruin himself if it were committed to his own management; so the believer, though an heir of God, and joint heir with Christ, yet till he is meet for the inheritance, he must be at his Maker's and Redeemer's disposal. Take in, therefore, only this limitation, and then see his extensive charter.

1 Cor. iii. 21.—For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present; or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's. What then is

the duty of a child of God? It is to breathe after more and more submission to the divine will, and to annex this reservation to every petition of a temporal nature, nevertheless, not my will but thine be done. And oh! my brethren, how happy the person who hath seen the weakness of human judgment; who waits the intimation of God's will, before he will suffer his desires to fasten with eagerness on any earthly comfort, and who endeavors to keep himself free from perplexity, by an humble and submissive reliance on the all-sufficiency of God!

I observed in entering on this part of the subject, that spiritual consolation, or sensible joy in God, is to be considered as a promise of the same class, which must, therefore, be asked with submission, and is dispensed according to the good pleasure of a gracious but sovereign God. I am sensible, as has been formerly observed, with another view, that some degree of comfort necessarily follows from a believer's relation to God, but many pious persons seem to desire and to expect sensible comfort in a higher measure than God sees it meet to give them, or, than is proper for them in the present state. It is with spiritual prosperity as with temporal, every one cannot bear it. Therefore, it is our duty still to be sensible that we have much more comfort and peace than we deserve, and as we desire and strive for greater degrees of it, to accompany these desires with much humility and resignation to the will of God.

I proceed now to the last thing proposed, which was to make a practical application of this subject for your instruction and direction.

1. From what has been said, you may see what judgment you ought to form of inward suggestions, and strong or particular impressions upon your minds. There are some extremely prone to interpret a text of scripture, suddenly suggested to their minds, or any strong impression made on them, as an immediate message from God, to be directly applied to themselves: Others, in opposition to this, as enthusiastical and visionary, seem to give up every expectation of being able to say with the Psalmist, *I bless the Lord who hath given me counsel, my reins also instruct me in the night season.* I beg, therefore, that you may observe, that the suggestion of a passage of scripture, of itself gives no title to the immediate application of it, because the great deceiver may undoubtedly suggest scripture, as we find he could reason from it in our Saviour's temptation. We are, in every such case, to consider the tenor of it, if it be a promise or encouragement, that is, how and in what manner it may be safely applied. If any thing happens to be suggested that expressly suits our present condition, either by setting home the obligation of duty, with particular evidence upon the conscience, or pointing out the grounds of comfort, it ought to be thankfully acknowledged as from the spirit of God. For example, if a person, un-

der the power of a spirit of bondage, and fear of divine wrath, hath suggested to him any of the extensive gracious assurances of mercy to the chief of sinners, it is his duty to lay hold of it. It is directly suited to his condition, and would be the very thing that a wise and judicious pastor would recommend to him for his relief. He may therefore, without hesitation, bless God for it, if it is brought with power and efficacy upon his heart. In the same manner, if a person under trouble hath suggested to him any of the promises of support under it, surely he ought, in the discharge of his duty, firmly to rely on the accomplishment of that part of the word of God. But in the reflex examination of a person's character or state, to apply the sudden suggestion of a promise or privilege, perhaps of a conditional nature, is certainly both sinful and dangerous. Sinful, because without warrant; and dangerous, because leading to delusion.

2. From what hath been said, you may see what it is that we ought to seek for, with the greatest earnestness, and may hope to obtain, with the greatest confidence. Recollect, I beseech you, the order in which I have mentioned the promises of God as the objects of trust and reliance. First of all the promises of salvation, deliverance from the guilt of sin, and a right to everlasting life; next whatever is necessary to the preservation and improvement of the spiritual life; and then in the

third place, proper accommodation, and suitable provision in our passage through the present world. They are here ranked according to their value in themselves, and the value which we should put upon them. Let us, therefore, take care that we never violate this order, which is necessary, not only because of their comparative value, but because of their mutual influence one upon another. It is in vain for us to expect to attain to the habit or practice of holiness, till we are united to God by faith in Jesus Christ. All the promises of the gospel are ratified in him. All the divine fulness is treasured up in him. Every divine gift is dispensed by him. Therefore, he says, John xv. 4. *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.* And the apostle Paul, Gal. ii. 20. *I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

In the same manner nothing can be more preposterous, than to fix our affections upon temporal mercies, or our attention upon the promises that relate to them, so as to lose view of our interest in God's favor, and the progress of our sanctification. All the temporal promises in scripture are made to the children of God as such, and for carrying on the purposes of his grace in them.—Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need

of these things. There is no promise in the whole volume of inspiration to the wicked and impenitent. *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.* He will either rebuke them in his wrath and chasten them in his hot displeasure, or give them up to a cursed, hardening, stupifying prosperity, than which, no state on earth is more to be dreaded.—Christian! never suffer an anxiety about your outward state to supplant or go before, or even to be separated from a concern, that you may not be found wanting when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary.

3. Let me beseech you to adore the wisdom, justice and mercy of God, in the order he hath established, according to the different nature of the promises. That which is of most, nay, properly speaking, of unspeakable value, and radically contains all the rest, is placed first in order, and offered in the most free and gracious manner, without money and without price. Salvation is preached to the chief of sinners, and a Saviour held forth as able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him. Many uses might be made of this, but the single use I intend to make of it, at present, as connected with the duty of trust, is to silence the complaints of envy and impatience. How prone are many to look with an evil eye upon the more extensive possessions, and greater apparent outward comfort which others enjoy? Does it not astonish you to think how much unbelief and ingratitude

there is in those repining thoughts? Meanness of rank, and poverty of state, are no hinderance at all to an interest in Christ, and a right to everlasting life. Nay, the gospel is preached to the poor.—Many a Lazarus has been carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom, while the rich and luxurious have lifted up their eyes in torments. Will you, can you, dare you then complain? Will you envy the man of the world, his stately palace—his elegant furniture, and his sumptuous fare? What is the amplest portion in the present life compared with the sure mercies of David? What child of God would exchange with any wicked man a prison for a palace, or a scaffold for a throne?

I beseech you to add to all this, that, even with regard to present peace or comfort, there is no comparison between a good man and a bad. *A man's life doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses.* This is a truth not only often repeated in the sacred oracles, but written in the clearest and most legible characters in the history of Providence.—Nay, even independently of virtue or religion itself, every human calamity, whether arising from sickness, reproach, contention, fear, or ungratified desire, rages with greater violence in the higher, than in the lower stations of life. A vain and conceited monarch once sent to ask at an heathen oracle, who was the happiest man on earth? and met with a deserved disappointment in the reply. If we should put a question much more profitable as well

as much more easily resolved, in what rank of life the most exquisite human misery has been found? I have no doubt but it ought to be *answered* upon a throne. Experience will always ratify the wise man's observation: *Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.* A sanctified lot is an inestimable treasure. The blessing of God on a cruise of oil, and a pot of meal, is better than inexhaustible mines of gold and silver. What cause of contentment and patience to the child of God!

In the last place, you may learn, from what has been said on the subject, what is the plainest, the shortest, and, indeed, the only sure way to deliverance from distress or calamity of whatever kind. It is to fly to the mercy of God through the blood of Christ, to renew the exercises of faith, in him, and, in proportion as it pleases God, to fill you with all joy, and peace in believing; you will perceive every other covenant-blessing flow clear and unmixed from this inexhausted source. It will lead to repentance, humiliation and submission. The sanctified use of the affliction will be obtained, and this brings deliverance of itself; for no rod will be continued longer, than it hath answered its end. At any rate, when suffering is necessary, grace, to suffer with patience, shall not be withheld. Would you have any more, and is not this remedy always at hand? Can the poorest man say it is not within the reach of his purse? It is, at once, effectual and

universal. It was once said in contempt of a worthy and pious minister, that he made so much of the blood of Christ, that he would apply it even to a broken bone. But bating what may be thought indecent in the expression, chosen on purpose to bring a good man into ridicule, the thing itself, I make bold to affirm, is a great and a precious truth. Faith in the blood of Christ makes a man superior to all sufferings. It softens their aspect—it abates their severity—nay, it changes their nature. When a man is under distress or calamity of any kind, and considers it only in itself, and independently of his relation to God, it retains its old nature, and tastes with all the bitterness of the original curse; but when it is considered as limited in its nature—its measure, and its continuance by a kind Saviour, the believer submits to it with patience, as a part of his Creator's will; bears it with patience in his Redeemer's strength, and sometimes is enabled to embrace it with pleasure, as serving to carry him to his Father's presence. Is this going too far? No, my dear brethren; there are great realities to which the word of God, and the experience of his saints, bear united evidence. Many here present, I doubt not, have been witnesses of this truth, in the carriage of their relations now with God; and not a few, I trust, will repeat the testimony to succeeding ages. I conclude all with that animated passage of the apostle Paul.—*2 Cor. iv. 16, 17. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is*

renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

