

CHAPTER 4.

THE DISTINCTIVE PRIVILEGE OF THE GODLY.

THE next thing that I am to handle is, To show you, that it is the privilege of the godly to distinguish from all thrones whatsoever this throne of grace.

This, as I told you, I gathered from the Apostle in the text, for he only maketh mention of it, but gives no sign here to distinguish it by; no sign, I say, though he knew that there were more thrones than this. “Let us come boldly,” saith he, “to the throne of grace;” and so leaves it, knowing full well that they had a good understanding of his meaning, being Hebrews — they being now also enlightened from what they were taught by the placing of the ark of the testimony and the mercy-seat in the most holy place; of which particulars the Apostle did then count it not of absolute necessity distinctly to discourse. Indeed, the Gentiles, as I have showed, have this throne of grace described and set forth before them, by those tokens which I have touched upon in the sheets that go before; for with the book of Revelations the Gentiles are particularly concerned, for it was writ to the churches of the Gentiles; also the great things prophesied of there, relate unto Gentile believers, and to the downfall of Antichrist, as he standeth among them.

But yet, I think that John’s discourse of the things attending the throne of grace, was not by him so much propounded because the Gentiles were incapable of finding it without such description, as to show the answerableness of the antitype with the type; and also to strengthen their faith, and illustrate the thing; for they that know, may know more and better of what they know; yea, may be greatly comforted with another’s dilating on what they know.

Besides, the Holy Ghost by the word, doth always give the most perfect description of things; wherefore to that we should have recourse for the completing of our knowledge. I mean not, by what I say, in the least to intimate as if this throne of grace was to be known without the text, for it is that that giveth revelation of Jesus Christ; but my meaning is, that a saint, as such, has such a working of things upon his heart, as makes him able by the word to find out this throne of grace, and to distinguish it to himself from others. For,

- 1.** The saint has strong guilt of sin upon his conscience, especially at first; and this makes him better judge what grace, in its nature is, than others can

that are not sensible of what guilt is. What it was to be saved, was better relished by the jailer when he was afraid of and trembled at the apprehensions of the wrath of God, than ever it was with him all his life before. Peter then also saw what saving was, when he began to sink into the sea: "Lord, save me," said he, "I perish." Sin is that, without a sense of which, a man is not apprehensive what grace is. Sin and grace, favor and wrath, death and life, hell and heaven, are opposites, and are set off or out, in their evil or good, shame or glory, one by another. What makes grace so good to us, as the sense of sin in its guilt and filth! What makes sin so horrible and damnable a thing in our eye, as when we see there is nothing can save us from it but the infinite grace of God?

Further, there seems, if I may so term it, to be a kind of natural instinct in the new creature to seek after the grace of God; for so saith the word, "They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; and they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." The child by nature nuzzles in its mother's bosom for the breast; the child by grace does by grace seek to live by the grace of God. All creatures — the calf, the lamb, etc., so soon as they are born, will by nature look for, and turn themselves towards the teat. And the new creature doth so too. For guilt makes it hunger and thirst, as the hunted hart does pant after the water brooks. Hunger directs to bread, thirst to water; yea, it calls bread and water to mind. Let a man be doing other business, hunger will put him in mind of his cupboard, and thirst of his cruse of water; yea, it will call him, make him, force him, command him, to bethink what nourishing victuals is, and will also drive him to a search out after where he may find it, to the satisfying of himself. All right talk also to such an one sets the stomach and appetite a craving, yea, into a kind of running out of the body after this bread and water, that it might be fed, nourished; and filled therewith. Thus it is by nature, and thus it is by grace; thus it is for the bread that perisheth, and for that which endureth to everlasting life. But,

2. As nature, the new nature, teacheth this by a kind of heavenly natural instinct; so experience also herein helpeth the godly much: for they have found all other places, the throne of grace excepted, empty, and places or things that hold no water. They have been at Mount Sinai for help, but could find nothing there but fire and darkness, but thunder and lightning, but earthquake, and trembling, and a voice of killing words; which words, they that heard them once, could never endure to hear them again. And as for the sight of vengeance there revealed against sin, it was so terrible that Moses, even Moses, said, "I exceedingly fear and quake."

They have sought for grace by their own performances; but, alas! they have yielded them nothing but wind and confusion. Not a performance, not a

duty, not an act in any part of religious worship, but they looking upon it in the glass of the Lord, do find it specked and defective.

They have sought for grace by their resolutions, their vows, their purposes, and the like; but, alas! they all do as the other, discover that they have been very imperfectly managed, and so such as can by no means help them to grace.

They have gone to their tears, their sorrow, and repentance, if perhaps, they might have found some help there; but all has either fled away like the early dew, or if they have stood, they have stunk even in the nostrils of those whose they were: how much more, then, in the nostrils of a holy God!

They have gone to God as the great Creator, and have beheld how wonderful his works have been; they have looked to the heavens above, to the earth beneath, and to all their ornaments; but neither have these, nor what is of them, yielded grace to those that had sensible want thereof.

Thus they have gone, as I said, with these pitchers to their fountains, and have returned empty and ashamed. They found no water, no river of water of life; they have been as the woman with her bloody issue, spending, and spending till they have spent all, and been nothing better, but rather grew worse.

Had they searched into nothing but the law, it had been sufficient to convince them that there was no grace, nor throne of grace, in the world. For since the law, being the most excellent of all the things of the earth, is found to be such as yieldeth no grace, (for grace and truth come by Jesus Christ, not by Moses,) how can it be imagined that it should be found in anything inferior?

Paul, therefore, not finding it in the law, despairs to find it in anything else below, but presently betakes himself to look for it there where he had not yet sought it, (for he some time sought it not by faith, but, as it were, by the works of the law;) he looked for it, I say, by Jesus Christ, who is the throne of grace, where he found it, and rejoiced in hope of the glory of God. But,

3. Saints come to know and distinguish the throne of grace from other thrones, by the very direction of God himself. As it is said of the well that the nobles digged in the wilderness, they digged it by the direction of the lawgiver; so saints find out the throne of grace by the direction of the grace-giver. Hence Paul prays that the Lord would direct the hearts of the people into the love of God. Man, as man, cannot aim directly at this throne, but will drop his prayers short, beside, or the like, if he be not helped by the Spirit. Hence the Son saith of himself, “No man can come to me, except the

Father, which hath sent me, draw him;” which text doth not only justify what is now said, but insinuates that there is an unwillingness in man of himself to come to this throne of grace: he must be drawn there. “He setteth us in the way of his steps,” that is, in that way to the throne, by which grace and mercy are conveyed unto us.

4. We know the throne of grace from other thrones, by the glory that it always appears in, when revealed to us of God. Its glory outbids all. There is no such glory to be seen anywhere else, either in heaven or earth. But I say, this comes by the sight that God gives, not by any excellency that there is in my natural understanding as such: my understanding and apprehension, simply as natural, is blind and foolish; wherefore, when I set to work in mine own spirit, and in the power of mine own abilities, to reach this throne of grace, and to perceive somewhat of the glory thereof, then am I dark, rude, foolish, I see nothing; and my heart grows flat, dull, savorless, and lifeless, and has no warmth in the duty; but it mounts up with wings like an eagle when the throne is truly apprehended.

Therefore, that is another thing by which the Christian knows the throne of grace from all others: he meets with that good there that he can meet with no where else. But at present let these things suffice for this.