

**HEAVEN POSED AND PRESSED
WITH QUESTIONS AND DEMANDS;
OR,
FAITH'S FREEDOM WITH GOD WARRANTED¹
By Ralph Erskine (1685-1752)**

"Thus saith the Lord, the holy One of Israel and his Maker, Ask me things to come, concerning my sons, and concerning the works of my hands, command ye me." *ISAIAH 45:11.*

THEY that truly seek Jesus who was crucified,² have liberty and allowance to seek any thing that is agreeable to the will of God, and that is promised in the new covenant. The ground of this liberty and freedom that God allows his people, is the righteousness of Christ,³ which is the ground of justification before God, God is so well-pleased for this righteousness's sake, that all who lay hold upon it are allowed the greatest freedom with God; such as this, "Ask me of things to come, concerning my sons, and concerning the works of my hands, command ye me."

From the beginning to the 9th verse of this chapter, we have an historical account of God's delivering Israel from their captivity, by the hand of Cyrus, an eminent type of Christ, our great and glorious Deliverer. From the 9th verse and downward to the text, we have God asserting his sovereign authority over all the rational world, and thereupon challenging their submission to him, and also claiming employment at their hand, such as is spoken of in this verse.

We may therein observe two things, 1. The employment that God challenges. And, 2. The authority by which he doth so.

1. We have here the employment which God challengeth: it is wonderful employment; "Ask me, command ye me. Ask me things to come:" consult my word, my prophets and their prophecies, with reference to these things; for, "Things to come (so far as they are revealed) belong to us, and to our children." And command ye me; I present myself, as it were, at your service; and you are allowed, by faith

and prayer, to use such freedom and liberty as if I were at your command. Here is, indeed, a wonderful thing; the Great God commanding us to command him!

Again, the matter about which the employment here is challenged, is concerning his sons, and the works of his hands: his church, his children, which are the special works of his hand, and wherein he is more concerned than anything else in all the world. It is as if he had said, If anything trouble you concerning yourselves, or any other of my children, directly or indirectly, so as you are puzzled and diffculted therewith, then come and put the question to me, and I will satisfy you; and if you would have anything done for you, or any of my children, come and put it upon me, and put me to it, as confidently as if you could command me.

I know some read this text with an interrogation, as carrying on the proof in verses 9 and 10, as if the meaning were, Are you so bold as to ask me concerning things to come? Or, dare you be so impudent as to command me concerning the works of my hands? Will you prescribe to me? But with the current of interpreters, we take the words in the former sense, as our translators also have done, viz., God's calling here for employment at his people's hand? Though God doth not allow us to strive with him by sin and unbelief yet now he here tells us, how we may wrestle with him by faith and prayer, for all things, for which he said he would be enquired of by the house of Israel.

2. We have the authority by which this employment is challenged: "Thus saith the Lord, the holy One of Israel and his Maker." He challenges this employment; he calleth us to this freedom by his own lawful authority: (1.) As he is the sovereign Lord, the great JEHOVAH. (2.) As he is the holy One of Israel, our covenanted God. Yea, (3.) As he is our Maker, who made us and not we ourselves.

I enlarge not upon the farther explication. My purpose is to speak a little to the following doctrine, namely:

That such is the unspeakable condescension of God in Christ, that he not only allows his people, but charges them, in all regular ways, to pose him with their questions, and press him with their commands.

In the prosecuting of this subject, we propose, through divine aid, to essay the following things:

I. To confirm the doctrine.

- II. To touch at some of these questions that he allows us to ask him concerning his sons, and the work of his hands.
- III. To shew how and wherein he allows us to press him with our commands.
- IV. To give some reasons of the doctrine. V. Make application of the whole subject.

I. We return to the confirmation of the doctrine, viz., That such is the condescension of God, as to allow poor sinners to pose him with questions, and to press him with commands: "Ask ye me; command ye

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me." No creature durst have spoke in this language, unless God himself had put it in our mouth. And that God condescends this way may be proved from these several steps of divine condescension I shall mention.

1. Such is the condescension of God, that he allows people to cry to him, and encourages them with a promise that he will answer, and that he will be, as it were, at their command. Read that word in the same prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 58:9, "Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here am I." Here I am, what is your command? What service have you for me: O the wonders of divine condescension, saying, Here I am to give what you want, and to do what you desire!

2. Such is the condescension of God, that he allows us not only to come to him and cry, but also to come boldly and confidently; Hebrews 4:16, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need." Again,

3. This may be confirmed from the experience of those that have entreated the Lord, and he hath been entreated of them. Isaac is said to have entreated God for his wife, when she was barren, and the Lord was entreated of him. The disciples going to Emmaus, Christ made as if he would go away from them, but they constrained him, and he was entreated of them: yea, Manasseh, one of the greatest rakes that ever was, and one in compact with the devil, when he was caught in the thorns and briars of Babylon, and brought under afflictions, it is said, "He besought the Lord," and the Lord was entreated of him.

4. It may be confirmed by considering this. Such is the condescension of God, that he is content to be held, as it were, in the arms of his people; "The King is held in the galleries; I held him, and would not let him go," says the church. "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," said Jacob. Yea, he subjects himself sometimes so far, as to let his servants hold his hands, when they are lifted up injustice, to avenge the highest treason; see a remarkable instance, Exodus 32:10-12,14, "Let me alone, that I may consume them," says God: No, says Moses; and so he fell an arguing with God, why his wrath should not wax hot, etc., When God is, as it were, upon horseback, ready to ride them all down with a vengeance, he gives his servants leave to hold the bridle. Again,

5. Such is the condescension of God, as that he grants to satisfy his people sometimes about the great mystery of his providence, and the equity of his procedure, as in the case of Abraham, when God was about to destroy Sodom, "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do?" Genesis 18:17. And, O what wonderful freedom did Abraham use with reference to Sodom and Gomorrah? "Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked? If there be fifty righteous there, wilt thou destroy it?" No, says God. If there be forty-five, wilt thou not spare them? Yes. Then he uses more boldness yet, and comes down by degrees, till he comes to ten; if there be ten righteous persons in Sodom, wilt thou spare it for their

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sakes? Yes, says God, verses 22-33. God continues granting as long as Abraham continues seeking. Abraham thought shame to go farther down; but it seems, if there had been but one good person among them all, Abraham might have got Sodom delivered for that person's sake; however, you see, he satisfies him to the full concerning the equity of his judgment, as far as he demands.

6. Such is the condescension of God, that he is pleased to communicate the secret of his covenant to his people; "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him," Psalm 25:14. He says to his disciples, "Ye are no more servants, but friends; the servants know not the master's will, but ye are friends; for whatsoever I have heard of the Father, that I make known to you," John 15:15.

7. The condescension of Heaven is such, that he is pleased to allow, as it were, his affections to be ravished with the act of faith, or with the prayer of faith; "Thou hast ravished my heart." O! it is a wonderful word that Christ says to the church in the Song, chapter 4:9, "Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." And again, chapter 6:5, "Turn away thine eyes from me; for thou hast overcome me." O! what is that! The Lord knows where our eyes are looking; he takes notice if you give but a kindly look towards him at his call; and if you give but a greedy look to him, you overcome him. One glance of the eye of faith has like a commanding influence; it commands salvation, as it were, to come out of God's hand; yea, such pleasure does he take in it, that he not only allows, but commands you thus to look: "Look to me, all the ends of the earth, and be saved: for I am God, and there is none else," Isaiah 54:22.

8. Such is the condescension of God, as that he puts the keys of heaven into the hands of his

people, that they may open the gates of heaven both for themselves and others; sometimes for themselves, for he says, "Whatsoever you ask in faith, it shall be given you;" sometimes for others, as Samuel, by prayer, opened, as it were, the gates of heaven, and brought down rain from thence. "Ask of me things to come," etc.

9. Such is the condescension of God to his people, that he allows them to press him, even after a refusal; or after he seems, by harsh answers, to refuse their suits, yet he allows them to press him with their commands, with their affairs; as the woman you read of, Matthew 15:22-28. When she was refused at first, and when she was told in effect, that she was not within his commission, "I am not sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and then rejected like a dog; yet she presseth forward, presseth even after a refusal, and this was so acceptable to God that you see how he commends her faith, "Great is thy faith, O woman; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." And, in a word,

10. Such is the condescension of God, that he allows poor sinners to come into his bosom with their polluted feet; "Though thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to me, saith the Lord," Jeremiah 3:1. Unbelief would say, Oh! how can I make so bold as to go in, as it were, into the bosom of God: stay till I get my feet

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washed? No; he allows us to come with our foul feet, that he may wash us himself; "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in me." It is the language of the unbelieving legal heart, we may not come to Christ till so and so qualified; let me be so and so well adorned, as it were, like a bride, and get on robes to deck me like a queen, and then, perhaps, I may be reckoned a fit match for him. But, O proud sinner, this pride must come down; God condescends to wash you, and do not you take his work out of his hand: it will not do; he allows you to come even into his bosom, polluted and defiled as you are. Say not, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man;" but rather say, Lord come to me, for I am a sinful creature. By these and the like instances, you may see the doctrine confirmed. I go on,

II. To the second thing proposed, namely, To touch at some of these questions, that he allows us to ask him concerning his sons, and the work of his hands. Here we shall, 1. Condescend on a few questions he allows us to ask at him. 2. Propound a variety of such as he allows us to ask him concerning his sons, and the work of his hands.

1st, We are to condescend on a few of these questions he permits us to ask at him,

1. The Lord allows us to come to him, and ask him, Where he dwells? As in John 1:38, "Rabbi, where dwellest thou?" This is a question that concerns his sons, his children; for their language many times is, "O that I knew where I might find him!" Job 23:3. God complains of people, that they do not ask this question, Job 35:10, "None say, Where is God my maker, that giveth songs in the night?" Jeremiah 2:8, "The priests said not, Where is the Lord?" It is a question that the church proposeth, Song 1:7, "tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flocks to rest at noon." And the Lord answers the question, verse 8, "If thou knowest not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents." And we find afterward, the church was in case to tell where he was, and where he feeds; "My Beloved feedeth among the lilies, until the day break, and the shadows fly away," chapter 2:16,17. She is in case to tell where he dwelleth; "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice, cause me to hear it," chapter 8:13.

2. He allows us to come to him with such a question as that, not only, where he is? but who he is? Isaiah 63:1, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?" etc. This is a question also that concerns his sons, his children. They need further discoveries of his name and glory: they want to know more and more of him, Who he is? And he is ready to answer the question in this manner, "I am he that speaketh righteousness, mighty to save, etc. I am the way, the truth, and the life; I am the resurrection and the life." Many ways does he satisfy them with reference to this question; sometimes at a communion table he makes himself known to them in the breaking of bread.

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3. It is lawful to ask him humbly, What hour of the night it is in Zion? Isaiah 21:11, saying, "Watchman, what of the night?" We may go with it to the chief watchman, that slumbers not, nor sleeps: It is a question that concerns his sons, his church and children, after a long night of sin and security, to know if it be not high time for people to be raised and awakened out of sleep and security, and to know if there be any hopes of the day dawning. The Lord answers this question by his watchmen, saying, "The morning comes, and also the night; if you will inquire, inquire ye; return, come." And this answer hath both a prediction and a direction in it. The prediction is, "The morning cometh, and also the night." Both a bright morning of peace and comfort, and a black evening of crosses and calamities, may be expected in succession: after a morning of gospel-light, we may prepare for an evening of darkness. The direction is, "If ye will inquire, inquire ye: return, come." Be inquisitive persons; go on in your inquiry: "Ask me things to come, concerning my sons;" and be penitent believers: "Return, come." Repentance here required, is a turning from sin to God, through Christ, by faith: "Return, come." It is not time to delay; no time to trifle; the night is coming on, the night of trouble, the night of trial, the night of death. If it be asked, What hour of the night it is with us in

Scotland, may it not be said, It is the dead hour of the night? O what dead hearts, dead frames, dead preaching and praying, dead Sabbaths and sacraments! Is it not a night of division, wherein the anger of the Lord hath divided us? A night of delusion, wherein the darkness of error abounds? Gospel truths are trodden down, and the gospel way of salvation little known, even by some that are teachers of others. Therefore,

4. We may come to God, and ask him this question, Jeremiah 14:8, "O Hope of Israel, and Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldst thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man, that turneth aside to tarry for a night?" And, as it is, verse 19, "Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? Hath thy soul loathed Zion? Why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us?" This is a question that concerneth his sons, when they are complaining before him, Alas, wherefore is the Lord such a stranger to me, and to the land? Wherefore is he angry at the prayers of his people? And whence are these tokens of his anger? Now, the Lord gives a suitable answer to this question, when he says, "Behold his hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated betwixt you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear," Isaiah 59:1,2.

5. He allows us to come to him with another question, Amos 7:2, "Lord, by whom shall Jacob arise, when he is small?" This is a question that concerns his sons, and the works of his hands, especially when his work seems to be brought under any decay: "By whom shall Jacob arise?" and he will answer the question, by saying, Isaiah 14:1, "The Lord will have mercy on Jacob." And, Isaiah 10:21, "A remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God;" that the

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"Redeemer shall come to Zion, and turn away transgression from Jacob," Isaiah 59:20; Romans 11:26. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself! but in me is thy help," Hosea 13:9. It is only by the God of Jacob, that Jacob shall arise.

6. He allows us to come to him with such a question as that, and to ask him, When will he come? As in Psalm 101:2, "O when wilt thou come unto me?" Why tarry the wheels of his chariot? Why so long? etc. This is a question also that concerns his sons, and the work of his hands. They are oft times solicitous to know when he will come; but the Lord's answer to the question is, as in Habakkuk 2:3, "The vision is for an appointed time; but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." God hath bound himself to accomplish his promises, but not to our time of it; therefore, we are to wait upon a promising God. Again,

7. He allows us to put to him such a question as that, Psalm 85:6, "Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?" This is a question that concerns his sons and children under their lamentable decays. And his answer to such a question may be expected to this purpose: "I will be as the dew to Israel, Hosea 14:5. They that dwell under his shadow, they shall return, and revive as the corn, and grow as the vine, and shoot forth their roots as Lebanon;" or, as it is, chapter 6:2, "After two days he will revive us; in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." By virtue of Christ's resurrection shall dead and dry bones be revived.

8. He allows us to come to him with such a question as that, Psalm 89:46, "How long, Lord, wilt thou hide thyself for ever? Shall thy wrath burn like fire?" And I have mine eye here upon the four *how* longs of the Psalmist, Psalm 13:1, 2. He allows them to come to him with their *how* longs, and he is ready to satisfy the longing soul. His answer many times is like that the angel spoke of, Zechariah 1:12,13, "The Lord answers with kind words," saying, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercy will I gather," etc. Isaiah 54:7.

9. It is a question of great concern he allows sinners to come to him with, viz., "O what shall I do to be saved?" And again, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Acts 9:6. It concerns all his people to know what and how to do; and they may expect his answer, according to that promise, Isaiah 30:21, "Thine ears shall hear a voice behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it." When you turn to the right hand, or to the left, and when Christ says, "I am the way," what should you do but come to him, and walk in him? "This is the work of God, that ye believe in him whom he hath sent."

10. There is another question he allows them to put to him, and that is, "Lord, what wilt thou do unto thy great name?" Joshua 7:9. It is said from verse 8, "O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs upon their enemies? For the Canaanites, and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth; And what wilt thou do unto thy great name?" Oh,

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how will thy name be dishonoured! What wilt thou do for the honour of thy great name; When his people come by faith, and pose him with a question to this purpose, what will be his answer? It is a question that concerns his sons mightily; this is their great argument in pleading with God for any blessing. That he would do for his great name's sake; and his answer is, Ezekiel 36:21,22, "I had pity for mine holy name," etc. "Thus saith the Lord God, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for my holy name's sake will I defer my anger," Isaiah 48:9. And, O it is a great matter to get hold of God's name! We ought always to take hold of it; they that urge him with his name, may ask what they

will. The Lord teaches his people to make his holy name their plea, saying, "Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, yet do thou for thy name's sake."

They that learn the way of interesting the name of God in their favours, and who, if they want grace, are seeking it for his name's sake; and, if they want pardon, are seeking it for his name's sake; O it is a promising thing! God would not let you lean upon his bosom in this manner, if he had not loved you with an everlasting love. An hypocrite or legalist may fall about duties, and think thereupon that God loves him, and is pleased with him; but if God loves you, he will stop your mouth, Romans 3:19, and make you, on your bended knees, to know and acknowledge that there is no reason for his love, but in his own bosom; nay, that there is all reason against it; and so plead only for his own name and glory's sake; and then you build upon a rock higher than all the powers of darkness, when your heart rests here. Being solidly persuaded of this, that if God will glorify his name, in saving you, none will be so much beholden to free grace, making the glory of his great name your plea, your hope, your resting place. This is a sign that you are lying in the lap of God's love. What will he not do for his name? This obliges him to work for his own sake, Ezekiel 20, compare verses 6,14,22,24. He cannot work against himself.

In a word, you may go through all you can find in the Bible, that the children of God can ask in faith concerning his sons, and the work of his hands, and may humbly put them to him; and whatever answer you can find in the Bible to them, that is God's answer to you that ask him duly. Again,

2ndly, Questions concerning things to come, may be put to the Lord. He allows you to ask him of things to come, concerning his sons, not excluding yourselves. And to this purpose, such questions may be put as follows:

Would you ask, "O what is to come of a poor creature, that is sensible of great guiltiness, and is oppressed with the sense thereof, and apprehensive of the great wrath of God upon the account of his great sins and innumerable provocations, and dare not so much as think that God will have mercy on him?" Alas! what is to become of such a one? God's answer is, I, even I, am he that blotteth out your iniquities and your transgressions, for my own name's sake; I will be merciful to

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your unrighteousness; your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more."

Again, do you ask, "What will become of a poor soul, sensible of its great and gross ignorance, saying, "I have been brought to God's school, and he hath been at much pains with me; and yet I am grossly ignorant of God, and the things of God; and blind like a mole?" God's answer is, "I will teach you to profit. They shall be all taught of God." Let such a soul plead that promise, "It is written in the prophets, They shall all be taught of God: whosoever, therefore, hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh to the Son."

Would you ask, "What will become of a poor soul, that sees its infinite distance from God, and fears it shall never be brought near unto him?" O! his answer is, That Jesus Christ hath brought down the middle wall of partition betwixt God and you; and by his death, "The vail of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom," that you may have boldness to enter into the holiest by his blood.

Would you ask, "What will become of a poor sinner, crossed with the power of sin, and if indwelling corruption, so as he fears hell will be his portion?" God's answer is, "I will subdue your iniquities. Sin shall not have dominion over you." Let such believe and embrace the promise of divine mercy through Christ: the promise of the Spirit, for sanctification; and take God's word for it, and they are safe.

Would you ask, "Alas! what will become of a poor soul, that is destitute of all good things, that finds its want of God, and Christ, and holiness; and want of every thing that is good; and made up of wants, both temporal and spiritual?" Why, his answer is, "The young lion shall want, and suffer hunger; but they that fear the Lord, shall want no good thing." But, oh! there is something in that word, say you, that cuts off my relation to such a promise; it is conditional to these who fear the Lord; and I am none of these. But I advise you, whenever you find such a promise, take hold of it as your own; and if you find a want of the condition, take hold of Christ for the condition, and take him and the promise both, and there will be no fear.

Would you ask again, "What will become of a poor impotent creature, that hath no ability to perform any duty, or resist any temptation?" God's answer is, that "He will give power to the faint; and to them that hath no might, he increaseth strength. My grace is sufficient for you; my strength shall be perfected in your weakness." Rest on his word, and it shall be well with you.

Do you ask again, "What will become of a poor tempted soul? The fiery darts of Satan are flying about my ears, and I am not in case to resist the darts of the enemy." The answer that God gives, is, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent. The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Therefore, O! rest on his word; and there is no fear of you.

Again, do you ask, "What will become of a poor deserted creature? I find God hiding his face; I have not met with him at this occasion; the

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Lord hides, he is far from me: what will become of such an one?" God's answer is, "Though weeping endureth for a night, joy shall come in the morning." I cannot stand on all these, so as to cite every chapter and verse; but all that know the scripture, will know scripture language when they hear it.

Again, do you ask, "What will become of such a poor afflicted one as I am, surrounded with waves on all hands, or inward and outward troubles: Oh! what will become of me?" God's answer is. Isaiah 54: 11, "O! thou afflicted, tossed with tempest and not comforted; behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires," etc. Precious things are there promised: and if you depend upon a promising God, your tribulation will end in a kingdom: "Through much tribulation, we enter into the kingdom of heaven."

But would you ask this question, "Oh! what is to become of one that finds such a power of sin taking place, as that he fears he will be a cast-away, and become just a reproach to the way of the Lord?" God's answer is, "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, that I will not turn away from you, to do _you good: I will put my fear into your hearts, and ye shall not depart from me."

Oh! say you, "What will become of one that is terrified at the king of terrors? What will become of me at death?" What is God's answer? "O death! I will be thy plague. O grave! I will be thy destruction: I will ransom thee from the power of the grave. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Death shall be swallowed up in victory." Just rest upon his word, and there will be no fear.

Again, would you ask, "What will become of one that is black like hell, that hath just the blackness of the devil upon him, and that is all deformed and defiled with the smoke of the bottomless pit?" Oh! a poor soul sighing, and asking such a question, What does God say to it? He says, "Though thou hast lain among the pots, yet shall you be as the wings of a dove covered with silver; and her feathers with yellow gold; I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness; and from all your idols will I cleanse you."

Would you ask, "What will become of one that hath no will to come to Christ, but finds a power of enmity and ill-will prevailing?" Why, if your enmity be your disease that you would have healed, God's answer is, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." It is good to see your enmity. Others think they love Christ well enough, who are yet in the gall of bitterness.

Would you ask, "What will become of one whose heart is the most hardened heart in all the world; harder than a stone, so as nothing can break it, nothing can touch or affect it?" God's answer is, "That he is able, out of these very stones, to raise up children to Abraham. I will take away the heart of stone, and give a heart of flesh." O take him at his word, and his word shall take effect upon you.

Well, are these your questions? and are you satisfied with God's answers? Have you any other sort of questions to ask?

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Do you ask, "What will become of such and such a wicked man, that is an enemy to the cause of God, and to the King of Zion?" Why, what says God of the wicked? His answer is, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." What says he of those who go on in their sin? Why, he saith, "He will wound the head of the wicked, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses."

Do you ask, "What will become of the enemies of Zion, the church's adversaries?" Why, God's answer is, "The enemies of the Lord shall be come as the fat of rams; they shall consume into smoke, they shall consume away."

Again, would you ask the question, "What will become of Zion itself, the city of our solemnities? What will become of the work of God, his witnessing work, covenanting work among the hands of professed friends, and of reformation-work, when the glorious beauty thereof is as a fading flower in a day of snares, temptations, and divisions, and dividing questions, among them?" O! where shall we expect an answer, but just from that God who says, "That he hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it:" even this, That he is the founder, and will be the Builder; and who says, "When he appears in his glory, he will build up Zion." We may rest upon what he hath said, that "The hand of Zerubbabel, that hath laid the foundation, his hand also must finish it." Time could fail me to propose all the questions that God condescends to answer in his word. But thus you see some of these questions that he allows his people to pose him concerning his sons.

III. The third thing is, How, and wherein he allows us to command him: "Concerning the works of my hands, COMMAND ye me." This word holdeth forth such a depth of divine condescension, as we durst not have uttered, unless he had said it, "Command ye me;" he enjoins us to command him.

1st, How may we command him? It is soon said, but not so soon done; for in one word, it is to be done by faith. Why, is it possible to command God? (Let us speak of it with reverence and wonder.) Yes, "All things are possible to him that believeth," Mark 9:33, and so this thing among the rest. But how can faith do this? Even because it engages the almighty power of God, and so sets God against himself, as it were, to overcome himself: thus the prayer of faith wrestles with God and prevails. How? Faith takes hold of such and such an attribute of God, and makes his own attributes to press him, and command him. For example,

Faith takes hold of the faithfulness of God who hath so and so promised. What, says faith, hast thou not promised this and that, and wilt thou not be as good as thy word? Hast thou not faithfulness for the girdle of thy loins? Are thou not a God of truth and veracity? Will the strength of Israel lie? No, no, says faith; it is not possible. And so faith puts God's own faithfulness on work to press upon him, and thus commands him.

So again, faith **takes** hold of the justice of **God**, that most dreadful attribute, which formerly was **like** hell to the **poor** sinful creature, **when** it thought upon it; but now the poor trembling **soul comes to God** and says to this purpose, Lord, I hear there **is** a ransom which **thou** hast found out; a ransom in the bloody sacrifice of a glorious Christ, which satisfies justice to the full; I have no hope of mercy, but only upon the account of this ransom; to this I fly for refuge; and thou hast declared that thou art well pleased for this righteousness' sake of Christ; his

giving obedience to the death, in the room of such lost sinners as I am. Hath infinite justice any more to demand than this infinite ransom? No, says God; then, says faith, I look for salvation upon the score of justice as well as mercy; for, justice, thou canst not refuse to give it, since thou hast taken complete satisfaction of Christ my Surety. Thus the Lord is bound by his own justice and commanded.

Thus faith presses him by setting his own glorious perfections to press upon him, and so it commands him; and I assure you, there is nothing more pleasing to God than this all commanding faith; God loves to be commanded by it, and will not be pleased with any of you that will not by faith thus command him. Enoch, before his translation, had this testimony, that he pleased God. How? It was by faith; for, "Without faith, it is impossible to please God," Hebrews 11:6. As it is impossible to command him in any sense without faith, so **it** is impossible to please him, unless by faith ye thus command him. But,

2ndly, Wherein does he allow himself to be commanded? Wherein does he enjoin us to command him I answer in general, We may command him in all things where in he can be serviceable to us, according to his promise. Whatever be in God that can do you service, ye may command it. As,

1. Have you any service for his power? He allows you to press his power to your service; you may command it. Are you not by nature without strength, man, woman; without strength to believe, strength to repent, strength to pray, strength to communicate; without strength to do anything acceptable to God? Now, poor impotent creature, I assure you, that the power and strength of God **is** at your service and command, if, under a sense of your own utter impotency, you will but give God any employment; and therefore, his call to every one of you is, Isaiah **27:5**, "Let him **take** hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and **he** shall make peace with me." Take hold of this strength, and say, Lord, dost thou offer thy power and strength to be at my service? I am sure, I have much service for it; and therefore, I accept of this power of thine to renew my corrupt nature, to subdue my strong lusts, to beat the devil out of his **old** quarters in **me**; I accept of this power to work grace in me, and to strengthen any grace thou hast wrought, and to fit me for my work and warfare in this wilderness. **O** give employment to the power **of** God, while he **is** telling you **it is** at command; or that, if you have ought ado with **his** power, you may freely command **it**.

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2. Have you any service for the wisdom of God? You may command it. Are you poor, senseless creatures, as well as weak? Indeed, the natural man thinks he has wit enough: "Vain man would be wise, though he be born like a wild ass's colt." But you lost all your wisdom since your head was cracked with the fall: Christ who is offered to you, is the very wisdom of God; "In him dwelleth all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;" and this wisdom is communicable; therefore, pray for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ; and employ his wisdom, saying, Lord, dost thou offer a poor fool thy wisdom to be at my service; I am sure I have much service for it, for I know not a step of my way unless wisdom lead me, I understand not a word of thy Scripture unless wisdom teach me; if you would give this employment to the wisdom of God, it is at your service in that promise, Isaiah 42:16, "I will bring the blind in a way that they know not, and in paths which they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." Thus, if you have ought ado with his wisdom, you may command it.

3. Have you any service for the righteousness of God? You may command it; it is at your service in that promise, Isaiah 46:12,13, "Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, and far from righteousness: behold, I bring near my righteousness, it shall not be far off; and my salvation shall not tarry: I will place my salvation in Zion for Israel my glory." If you saw God's law right, my friends, you would perceive such a perfection and spirituality in it, as that no man living can now fulfill it, and get righteousness and life by it. Now, the gospel tells you good news, namely, That perfect righteousness, answering all the demands and commands of the law, hath been wrought out by Christ, that this righteousness of Christ, is the righteousness of God, of him who is God as well as man, and a righteousness of God's providing and of God's accepting: the gospel tells you, that this righteousness of Christ, is freely and fully offered to all the hearers of the gospel; "To you is the word of this salvation sent"; we offer it to you all; this offer is the ordinary appointed, means of faith, Romans 1:16, "The gospel is the power of God to every one that believeth." Why? "Because therein is revealed the righteousness of God from faith to faith." If we could preach more of this righteousness, we might expect more of the power of God to go along with our preaching.

You have but a poor trade of it, that are hunting after justification and acceptance with God by your

own righteousness; if you seek it in the works of the law, you must still be doing, and never have done; yea, in this way you are but undoing yourselves, dishonouring Christ, frustrating the grace of God, and making your own justification both imperfect and impossible, for "By the deeds of the law no flesh living can be justified." Now, the perfect righteousness of God **is in** your offer; if you have any service for it, you may command it: **O!** wilt thou refuse it, poor, guilty soul, that hast nothing of thy own but filthy rags! Know you not that this was the ground of God's rejecting of the Jews, because

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they rejected the righteousness of God, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they would not submit to the righteousness of God. They thought it below them to be beholden to another for righteousness; they thought themselves good enough, and that they might make a shift to win to heaven by their own good works, good wishes, good desires, and endeavours. Now, if any here see the absolute need of this righteousness of God, you may command it; God is not holding it from you, but offering it to you: take it, and his blessing with it; take it, and say, Lord I have no righteousness of my own, nothing but guilt. and sin; but, seeing in the gospel offer thou dost exhibit this everlasting righteousness of Christ to be at the service of such a bankrupt; I desire to look with disdain and abhorrence upon all my own righteousness in point of justification; and I would not be found in it for a thousand worlds, but would be found in Christ. having his righteousness, which is by faith; and I desire to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Thus, if you have ought ado with his righteousness, you may command it.

4. Have you any service for the Spirit of God? You may command him. O sirs, have you no need of the Spirit to convince you, to comfort you, to sanctify you, and to seal you unto the day of redemption? If you have any such employment for the Spirit, he is at your service in that promise, Ezekiel 36:27, "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." Accept of this promise of the spirit: and lie shall be in you as a well of water springing up to everlasting life. If you think you have need of the Spirit, then put God to his word. It is said of the Galatians, "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" Importing that there is no way of receiving the Spirit but by the hearing of faith; that is, by embracing the promise of the Spirit when you hear it made to you; as when God says. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." etc., let your heart say, Amen, Lord, even so be it.

Now, when you have the Spirit of God at your command, or at your service, what want you? O! blessed be God that ever there was a promise of the Spirit. As I know nothing more frequently and fully promised in the word than the Spirit of God; so, I know nothing you can want if you have the Spirit. Do you want grace? He is the Spirit of grace. Do you want faith? He is the Spirit of faith. Do you want love? He is the Spirit of love. Do you want holiness? He is the Spirit of holiness. Do you want a heart to pray? He is the Spirit of prayer and supplication. Now, welcome, poor soul, who wants all these things to take the promised Spirit; you have all these things at your command when you have the Spirit. Are you complaining you have a dead heart? He is the Spirit of life. Have you a passionate spirit? He is the Spirit of meekness. Have you little wit? He is the Spirit of wisdom. Are you a fool, and know not what to choose? He is the Spirit of counsel. Sit down

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and devise wants, and he hath names to answer them all.

Now, the Spirit of God, and all his grace, all his influences, and saving operations, are at your service, and at your command; and, if God's rich offers of grace have so far prevailed against your natural enmity, that your whole soul is content to take what he offers, it is your own; whosoever will, let him come and take all this grace freely, it is your own fault if you go from this without an ample supply this day. If you have ought to do with the Spirit, you may command him; you may have him as a Spirit of all grace.

5. What shall I say to sum up all? Have you any service for God himself? You may command him; he offers himself to be at your service, in that promise, "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people," Hebrews 8:10. Some will, perhaps, make other terms to you in God's covenant, and tell you, if you be his people, he will be your God, but that is not the gospel; the gospel says not, I will if ye will; but it is absolute and sovereign, I will and ye shall: "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people." This covenant does not only give life upon the terms of believing, but it gives, it promises faith and believing also; "Thy people shall be willing: Ye shall be my people." Let the most unworthy wretch in the world who hears this gospel, say, Amen, Lord, be it so as thou sayest; and if you cannot say Amen, beg that God would help you to say it.-I know no terms or conditions on your part, but to consent that God may work in you all the terms and conditions you want. If I understand the gospel at all, sirs, I understand this, that I cannot go as low with the terms of the gospel as Christ allows; Christ will go lower, and seek less qualifications than we can do for our hearts. If ever some of us got good of the gospel, God behaved to reach as low as hell to take us up.

Well, all of you that think this promise can do you any service, take it to you, "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people." This is the sum of God's covenant; and if you take hold of it, and welcome these news, you shall be happy in time and through eternity; for God's word of grace hath taken you by

the heart.

Now, thus I have told you, in a few particulars, wherein God allows you to command him. I might expatiate here, and tell you that as far as the promises go, which you are called to embrace, God and all his attributes, all his perfections, all his fullness, is at your service; Christ and all his offices, purchase, blood, merit, and grace, is at your service to make use of, as you need them: when you command God, you command all; and he commands you to press him, and put him to it; "Concerning the works of my hands, command ye me." You may put him to it concerning his church and people; and press him with what he hath promised to them. Where God hath bound himself voluntarily out of love, do not ye loose him by unbelief; but receive his gracious promise, and take him bound as he offers himself: believe his promise, and engagements by promise; and thus you will set a seal to his truth and faithfulness. But I come now,

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IV. To the fourth thing in the general method, viz. The reasons of the doctrine, That God allows us, yea, with all authority enjoins us, to pose him, with our questions, and press him with his commands. Here I would essay these three things. 1. Give reasons why he allows us to pose him with questions. 2. Why he allows us to press him with commands. 3. Why he not only allows, but with all authority enjoins, saying, "Thus saith the Lord, the holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask of me things to come, concerning my sons, and concerning the works of my hands, command ye me."

1st, Why doth he allow us to pose him with questions? To this we reply,

1. Because he knows people are ready to consult hell, and their own hearts, when they should consult God; and he knows, that when we consult the devil, or our own hearts, we get but a desperate answer from the devil, and a deceitful answer from our own hearts, and neither of the two to our advantage. The proof of this reason is couched up, Isaiah 44:25, "He frustrateth the tokens of liars, and makes diviners mad, that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish," etc. We are ready to believe a lie rather than God's truth: therefore he allows us to ask him.

2. He allows us to ask him questions, and pose him with them, because our questions are very defective, both for matter and manner, and are very subject to be mistaken; and God only understands them: Yea, such is the exercise upon the spirit of his people sometimes, that many of their questions are incommunicable to any other but God himself. A child of God will go and ask his heavenly Father a question, that he will not ask the nearest friend in the world. Now, their questions being unintelligible to others, and incommunicable to others; therefore, God allows them to ask him.

3. He allows us to pose him with our questions, because many of them are unanswerable by any other but God himself. All the wit in the world cannot answer some questions that concern God's people, in a satisfactory way; and I have little skill of that Christian, that is not exercised now and then with some doubts, that all the ministers in the world cannot answer. Thus you have the reasons, why we are to pose him with our questions.

2ndly, Why, in condescension, he allows us to press him with our commands; "Command ye me." God was at vast pains, in the former verse, to make the people know their own place, so as not to strive with him; and here he obtests them, in their own place, to be bold with him: "Command ye me." And, indeed, a child of God is never helped to more boldness in pleading with God than when his heart hath been brought, by an awful impression of divine sovereignty, to know his own room, his infinite distance from God. Why doth he allow us to press him with our commands, and with all our adoos? Why,

1. His allowing us to press him thus, flows from the full bensail of his own love; for,

"His delights were with the sons of men," Proverbs 16

8:3 1. And therefore, he delights to be pressed and employed by them. His kindness

makes him love to have men courting his kindness.

2. Because he knows what jealous spirits and unbelieving hearts we have; therefore he allows us to press him, and put him to it. Through unbelief we are ever ready to be jealous that God is not in earnest with us; we are apt to think, that God, with Naphtali, is cheating us with goodly words. We look upon his offers as idle tales, and believe them not; therefore, he enjoins us to press him so hard, as if we would command; for he knows that no less than this will satisfy our incredulous hearts concerning his kindness; and hardly this will do it.

3. He calls us to press him, that he may thus make all unbelievers inexcusable. They that reject such condescending offers of grace, shall have heaven and earth, and their own consciences, to witness against the corruption and enmity of their own hearts, when such amazing tenders of grace are rejected: this testifies that nothing but the rebellious obstinacy of your own will is your ruin; though, in the meantime, by these condescending offers, he draws out the heart-love of his chosen to himself. Thus you have the reasons why he allows us to press him with our commands.

3rdly, Why does he not only allow, but with all authority enjoin us to pose him and press him thus, saying, "Thus saith the Lord, the holy One of Israel and his Maker, Ask me of things to come, concerning my sons and concerning the work of my hands, command ye me?" Where you see he charges us by his sovereignty, as he is the Lord; by his particular relation to the church, as he is the holy One of Israel; and by his general relation to all, as he is our Maker, he charges us to ask him, and command him. Why does he interpose his authority for this effect?

1. Because he knows people are averse from doing it. "The carnal mind is enmity against God;" and much of this enmity remains even in the hearts of the regenerate, though their aversion from coming to him may many times be covered with a mask of humility; they may be jealous of their allowance, and doubt if God allows them to be free with him, because they are conscious of their own naughtiness.

2. He authoritatively enjoins it, because he knows that his people are hopeless and desperate many times, as to several things that concern them; therefore he enjoins them to ask him, and command him concerning these things. And the reason why they are oft-times desperate and hopeless, is because they find that formerly they have had so many fruitless vows, fruitless resolutions, fruitless desires, fruitless prayers, that sense and reason make them think, "Why should we wait on the Lord any longer?" Therefore, that faith may not lose its feet in fruitless despair, he interposes his authority to stir them up again. And therefore,

3. He charges us with all authority, that we come to him, and employ him with all confidence, that we may hope against hope, and believe against unbelief; seeing he charges us as he is the Lord, the holy One

of Israel, and his Maker.

He takes three titles or designations here to himself, because of three sorts of persons he hath to deal with.

(1.) There are some that know him by his name JEHOVAH, *the Lord*; the great Sovereign, whose will is a law; though they dare not say they have any interest in him. To such he saith, "thus saith the Lord, Ask me things to come, and command me."

(2.) There are some that know him to be the *holy One of Israel*; a God in covenant with Christ, and in him with them, to make them holy and happy: and a God in covenant with Israel, to be their Saviour and Sanctifier. To these that know him thus, he says, "Thus saith the holy One of Israel, Ask me,

command me."

(3.) There are some that dare say no more of God, and their knowledge of him, but that he is their Maker, the God that made them: To such he says, "Thus saith the Lord, his Maker, Ask me, and command me:" ye that know him to be the Lord, ye that know him to be the holy One of Israel, ye that know no more of him, but that he is your Maker, he obtests and charges you, by all that he is in himself, by all his relations to you, and interests in you, that you boldly credit him with all your concerns, and ask him of your doubts, and command him with your ado. So much for the doctrinal part. I come now,

V. To the fifth thing, which was the application, in an use of information, caution, trial, and exhortation.

1st, For information. Is it so, That God allows and commands us thus to pose him, and press him? Then,

1. See the wonderful grace, condescension, and good-will of God towards the children of men: "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;" and therefore he not only makes a most rich and glorious offer of Christ, and all his fullness to us, but he calls and commands us to ask him, and press him: that we may know he is in earnest with us in his offers, he charges us to be in earnest with him in our suits, and to force all needful blessings out of his hand: "The kingdom of heaven suffers by violence, and the violent take it by force." This holy violence is most pleasing to God. You are not straitened in God, for the external revelation of his will; but miserably straitened in your bowels through the internal corruption of your wills.

2. Hence I infer, that the children of God may come to him with boldness, and can never be at a loss what to do in their straits, as long as in all doubts they may ask him, and in all their difficulties they may command him. "It is below a Roman spirit, said one, to say, I am undone, as long as Caesar lives:" much more is it below a child of God to say, I am undone as long as Christ lives; and as long as he may ask and command what he will, or rather what he needs. He can never be in such a strait, but he may know what to do, and where to go. "We may go to him, and get a word for our relief, whatever is the matter

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with us. It was said of Luther. that, in prayer, he got what he pleased from God; and there is something of this power with God, that every believer hath, according to that word, Job 22:27,28, "Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee; and thou shalt pay thy vows: thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall also be established to thee; and the light shall shine upon thy ways." I mind a word of Tertullian, *Coelum tundimus et misericordiam extorquemus*: we knock at heaven, and the merciful heart of God flies open, which we bring away with us.

3. If God allows us to pose him with our questions, then hence I infer, that well may we allow him to pose us with his questions; if we may ask God questions with all humility, then God may ask us questions with all authority. You will say, What questions does God ask of him? There are some questions he is asking at the wicked; some he is asking at the godly.

(a) I will tell you a question or two that he is asking at the wicked, who live in the contempt of all his rich offers of grace. He asks you, "O fools, when will you be wise?" (For gaining of time, I shall not cite all the Scriptures I will mention). He asks you, "How long will ye love vanity, and follow after leasing?" Psalm 4:2. "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?" Proverbs 1:22. He asks you, "O Jerusalem, wilt thou not be made clean? When shall it once be?" He is asking you, O fallen sinner, saying, "Adam, where art thou?" What a sinful miserable state art thou now into? He is asking you, O unconverted soul, "What concord hath Christ with Belial? What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What communion hath light with darkness? Can two walk together except they be agreed?" You have no communion with God in that state. He asks you, O liar and swearer, "What shall be given to thee. thou false tongue?" Will it not be sharp arrows of the mighty, and coals of juniper, if thou repentest not? He asks you, O debauched drunkard, "who hath woe, who hath redness of eyes, who hath sorrow?" Is it not they that tarry long at the wine? He asks you, O whoremonger, adulterer, Sabbath-breaker, and otherwise profane persons, "What fruit had you in these things whereof ye are now ashamed?" He asks you, O rebellious sinner, "How oft would I have gathered you, as a hen doth her chickens under her wings, and ye would riot? Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" He asks you, O ungrateful sinner, "Do you thus requite the Lord, O foolish and unwise? What iniquity have you found in me, that ye have departed far from me?" He asks you, O self-justifying sinner, "Why perceivest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and seest not the beam that is in thine own?" For there is a generation that is pure in their own eyes, yet are riot washen from their iniquities." He asks you, O idle sinner, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" etc. He asks, O hypocrites and formalist, "when you fasted, did you at all fast unto me? When you did eat and drink, did you not eat for yourselves, and not for my honour? "If I be a Father, where is my honour? If I be a Master, where is my fear?" He

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asks you, O lukewarm Gallio, that cares for none of these things, standing, as it were, betwixt heaven and hell, in a suspense: he asks you, "How long will ye halt betwixt two opinions? If God be God, follow

him; if Baal, then follow him." He asks you all, impenitent Christless sinners, "What will ye do in the day of visitation, in the desolation that shall come from far? To whom will ye fly for help? and where will ye leave your glory? How shall ye escape the damnation of hell? How shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation?" See what answer you give to these questions that God is asking you, and which he asks for your conviction, that ye may turn at his reproof, and answer with a "Behold, we are vile!" and, "Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God." If you will not think of answering these questions thus now, I will tell you what God will say, "Because I called, and ye would not answer; the time cometh, when ye shall call, and I will not answer; yea, I will laugh at your calamity. and mock when _your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolations, and your destruction as a whirlwind," Proverbs 1:26, etc.

(b) I will tell you a question or two that God is asking his people; for as they ask him, so he asks them, time about, as it were. He asks you, O doubting believer, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" What reason have you to doubt of my love, and to doubt of my kindness? He asks you, O strong believer, "Who made thee to differ? By grace ye are what ye are." He asks you, O secure believer, "What, could you not watch with me one hour? Is this your kindness to your friends?" He asks you, O careless believer, "What do you more than others?" Should you not study to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect? "Are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, to end in the flesh?" He asks you, O untender believer, that takes not so much heed to your walk before the world as you ought, his question is, "Ought you not to walk in the fear of the Lord, because of the reproach of the heathen your enemies?" Will you cause the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme? Should not the love of Christ constrain you? He asks you, O dark believer, of little knowledge, "Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" Might you not by this time have been teachers, yet, "You need to be taught what are the first principles of the oracles of God?" He asks you, O legal believer, that art seeking comfort in your duties more than in Christ, "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" For much of this legal temper is even in the best, seeking comfort in their own duties, privileges, attainments, enlargements, and experiences, more than in Christ. His question to you is, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" Are you not married to Christ, and so your old husband, the law, is dead?" "We are become dead to the law, by the body of Christ, and married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God," Romans 7:4. Should you not seek your comfort in your living Head and Husband, and in his righteousness? Again, he asks you, O mourning believer, "Woman, why weepest thou, whom seekest thou?" Man, why weepest thou, whom seekest thou? Fear not ye, if ye be

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seeking Jesus who was crucified. He asks you, O inquisitive believer, "What is thy petition, and what is thy request? It shall be granted to the half of the kingdom, yea to the whole of the kingdom. Go tell him what you are seeking, and seek his grace to answer his questions, as you would wish his condescension to answer yours.

Are you seeking great things for yourselves? That is but a sorry matter. Are you seeking a good frame, a tender frame? That is but a little thing. Are you seeking heaven and salvation? That is not much for God to give; but he would have you seeking more. Are you seeking a new heart, and a supply of all your wants? That is something; God may get some glory this way, but he would have you seeking more. Are you seeking grace and glory, and every good thing, even all the purchase of Christ? Well, that is much, but God hath more to give, and would have you seeking more yet. What then? Are you seeking God and Christ, and the Spirit, and all the fullness of God? That is an errand indeed. Where sits that person that would have God and all his fullness? God is saying of that poor creature, My blessing be upon him, for I will get great honour and glory by that seeker, "Your hearts shall live that seek God." Thus I say, seeing God allows you to pose him with your questions, you may expect that he will pose you with his questions, and seek what answer you can make to them.

4. If God allows you to press him with your commands, hence I infer, That there is infinite reason, that he press you with his commands, and that you obey them. He commands you to believe, "This is his great commandment, that ye believe in the name of his Son." He commands you to love him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, strength, and mind." He commands you to love one another. If any thing engage you to obey any of his commands, it will be the love he manifests in condescending to let you pose him with your doubts, and press him with your adoos; and in condescending to send the Son of his love out of his bosom, to purchase by his blood this freedom and boldness that you may use with God, who, among other commands, doth command you to ask him, and command him.

5. Hence see, what things we are especially to ask of God for ourselves and others, namely, "Things to come." Future things that are always to come. Things of this world are vanishing and perishing things, they are not things to come, but all spiritual blessings, are things to come; and these we should seek for ourselves and for our children. I give instances of some of them,

(a) Regeneration is a spiritual blessing, and it is a thing to come, for, though a child of God be but once born again, yet this blessing is never lost again, "The seed of God abideth in him, and abideth for

ever."

(b) Justification is a spiritual blessing, and a thing to come; for once pardoned, and always so. The ground of justification is the everlasting righteousness of Christ, "There is not condemnation to them that are in Christ," they stand forever justified in him.

(c) Adoption is a blessing among the things to come, the children of 21

God are still so, he is their everlasting Father, and they are heirs of God and eternal glory.

(d) Sanctification is a blessing that is always to come; they that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, they have the Spirit of Christ in them as a well of water springing up to everlasting life.

(e) Spiritual consolation is a thing still to come; it is called everlasting consolation; it grows upon an everlasting root: though it is not still flourishing here, yet it issues in rivers of pleasure that are at God's right-hand forever.

(l) Communion with God in Christ, by the Holy Ghost, is a thing to come. This, and all the rest of these spiritual blessings, have a beginning, but they have no end; "The Lord shall be thy everlasting light, and thy God thy glory."

In a word, the great leading blessing we should ask of God, is God himself, and all these blessings in him, because they are things to come, and all in him, "Who was, and is, and is to come. This God is our God for ever and ever. Thus, I think, the things to come here, may be viewed as meant of future things, that are in their nature permanent and everlasting, being the better part that cannot be taken from us; as well as of future events in the course of providence, and the spiritual acts thereof, which God exercises towards his church and children.

6. Hence see, that these things to come, are to be asked of God, who only hath the giving of them at command. when he enjoins us to ask these things of him, he tells us we cannot command them: when he enjoins us to command him, he wills us to know that he hath all blessings at his command only; and to plead that he may command the blessing: "Command ye me." It is not a command of prescription, but a command of petition and supplication, concerning the work of his hands. We are not to take it out of his hand, seeing he calls it "the work of his hand:" it is not the work of our hands. We have no capacity for spiritual work; yea, we are under a manifold incapacity for it.

(a) We are under a natural and physical incapacity, in regard we are dead in sins and trespasses, Ephesians 2:1.

(b) Under a legal incapacity, as being dead in law, and under the curse and sentence thereof, Galatians 3:10.

(c) We are under a moral incapacity, by reason of our defilements and pollutions, and being, by nature, without strength.

(d) Under a judicial incapacity, by the righteous judgment of God for our original apostasy; we are in the hand of Satan, the jailor, who worketh in the hearts of the children of disobedience: we are led captive by him at his pleasure.

(e) We are under an habitual contracted incapacity for the work of God, by reason of our customary sinning; "Can the Ethiopian change his colour, or the leopard his spots? No more than we that are accustomed to do evil, can learn to do well."

(l) We are under an universal incapacity. Universal, subjectively; in regard the whole man is corrupted; "The whole head is sick, the whole 22

heart faint; from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, we are all full of wounds, bruises. and putrefying sores: and universal, objectively; for, whatever spiritual work it is we are called unto, we can do nothing at it. Disciples themselves can do nothing of themselves: "Without me ye can do nothing," says Christ, "We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves," says the apostle. If this be the case, that we are under an utter incapacity for spiritual work, what a mercy is it, that God enjoins us to put the work in his hand, saying, "Ask of me; and concerning the work of my hands, command ye me." But,

2ndly, The second use is for caution, or dehortation. Does God allow you, in all regular ways, to pose him with your questions, and to press him with your commands? Then beware of irregular ways of doing it. There are two ways wherein people may be irregular in their demands; that is. either, 1. When the matter of their demands is unlawful: or, 2. When the manner wherein they make their demands is wrong, though the matter were right.

1. I say. we are to beware of irregularity as to the matter of our questions or demands; that is, coming to God with sinful questions; such as these following:

(a) We are not to ask such a question as that, "How doth God know? But, He that made the eyes, shall he not see? He that gives man knowledge. shall he not know? Yea, His understanding is infinite. The Lord is the God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. He searcheth Jerusalem as with a lighted candle." Do not question his omniscience: for, as he sees in secret, to reward openly them that fear him; so he sees in secret to punish openly them that fear him not.

(h) We are not to ask him such a question as that, "Who shall ascend to heaven, to bring down Christ? or, who shall descend into the depths, to bring up Christ?" Romans 10:6-8. We are discharged to say it in our hearts; and yet the heart is ready to say it when we are hearing the word, and hearing

Christ offered in it: Oh! he is far away: he is in heaven; there is no winning to him; nay, but we are not to say so; for he is nigh when his word is nigh; "He is in this word of faith which we preach." Now, this word, says the Holy Ghost, is even in our mouths, and in our hearts. The word is in our mouths; and when we find it there we should eat it; "Thy words were found of me, and I did eat them," Jeremiah 15:16. And when the word is in your mouth, Christ is there; and you should feed upon him in the word as well as in the sacrament. And as the word is in your mouth, so it is in your heart that you may embrace him. But,

(c) We are not to ask such a question as that, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Can he give us bread to eat? Can he provide flesh for his people? Psalm 78:19,20. This is the question of unbelief, Can God provide supply for my temporal or spiritual necessities? Can he pardon such sins as mine? Can he subdue such corruptions as mine? Can he supply such wants as mine? "How can these things be?"

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Oh! blasphemous unbelief! What cannot a God of infinite power do? This infidelity hath a mouth full of blasphemy. What answer gave God to this question to Israel? It is said, "God heard and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger came up against Israel, because they believed not in God, nor trusted in his salvation."

(d) We are not to ask such a question as that, "Wherefore have we fasted, and thou hast not seen? Wherefore have we afflicted our souls, and thou takest no knowledge?" Isaiah 58:3. This is the language of the hypocrite and legalist, who hath an over-rating thought of all his duties; Wherefore have we fasted, and thou hast not seen? Wherefore have we prayed, and thou hast not heard?" They challenge God of injustice, for not giving them what they think they merit; "I thank God," said the Pharisee, "that I am not as other men, no adulterer, no murderer, nor like this publican; I fast twice-a-week, I give alms of all that I possess." This was no prayer; but a proud boasting of what he had done for God, and what obligations he laid upon heaven: a poor believer is of another spirit, let him do never so much, he sees all his righteousness to be rotten rags, a menstruous cloth; my tears need to be washen in the blood of the Lamb. Again,

(e) It is not safe to ask such a question as that, "Lord, what shall this man do?" John 21:21. Some that are attached to a respect of persons, in order to follow them, may be ready to say, What will this man or that man do? What course will this minister or that minister take? What side will this or that man turn to, when debateable things cast up? But such a question is justly answered with another, such as Christ put to Peter in that place, "What is that to thee? Follow thou me." Take you the plain road of duty, without troubling yourself with what this or that man will do. Blessed are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth; follow none but as they follow Christ.

(f) We are not to ask him such a question as that, "Where is the promise of his coming?" II Peter 3:4. This is the language of the graceless and profane, who would wish, with all their hearts, that Christ would never come again, and put the evil day far from them, that they may take leave to indulge themselves in all manner of sin, because sentence against evil works is not speedily executed; but know, that Christ will come to judgment, as certainly as if you just now beheld him; "Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him; and they also which have pierced him, and all nations shall wail because of him."

(g) We are not to ask him such a question as that, "Who will shew us any good?" though there be many that say so, Psalm 4:6. This is the question of the covetous worldling, and which Christ cautions his disciples against. "Say not, What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed? Be careful for nothing; but cast all your care upon him, who careth for you." But, if you will fill your hearts with anxious cares and covetous questions to that purpose, "Who will shew us any good?" Then see what answer you will make to

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that question that Christ asks you, "What shall a man profit, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

(h) We are not to ask him such a question as that, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?" Matthew 8:29. This is the language of the devil; and yet such devilish hearts are among us that say the same thing. Some say it more closely and hiddenly under the shadow of humility, What have I to do with Christ, that am so unworthy of him? What have I to do with his blood, his righteousness, and merit, his Spirit, his promise, his grace, his fullness? Is it for the like of me? Have I any concern or interest therein? Yes, you have to do with all these; and you are called to make use of them, unless you will rank yourselves with the devils to whom they were never offered. Again, some say it more grossly and profanely, What have we to do with Christ? What have we to do with his ordinances? What have we to do with his sacraments? What have we to do with his Sabbaths? What have we to do with to many sermons? We are wearied to the heart with them; and we care not a fig for these things, "What a weariness is it?" "Take a carnal man, says one, tie him to a post, and you may kill him with praying and preaching." We are not so foolish as to trouble ourselves about these things? What have we to do with them? Lord pity such creatures, for they are as like the devil as they can look, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?"

2. As we are to beware of irregularities as to the matter of our questions or demands, so likewise, we are to be cautious, the manner wherein we make our demands. We are allowed to ask questions, such as I mentioned in the doctrinal part, and to make demands, so far as the promise goes, and do it regularly; that is, in a way of acknowledging God's sovereignty, and in a way of submission thereto. I mention these two, because they seem both to be pointed out to us in the preceding context here.

(a) Our demands ought to be in a way of acknowledging God's sovereignty and power, which we have expressed here, Isaiah 45, from the beginning of the chapter, where you see the great God raising up Cyrus to accomplish his merciful purpose concerning Israel, in delivering them from their Babylonish captivity; wherein he was an eminent type of Christ, our great Redeemer; he names Cyrus here, as the instrument of Israel's deliverance, two hundred and ten years before it came to pass; and God puts honour upon him, by calling him his shepherd, chapter 44:28; his servant, his anointed, that was to perform all his pleasure, intimating to us, by the by, that it is the greatest honour of the greatest men to stand up for the deliverance or defence of the church and people of God; for, though they were Pagans, as Cyrus was, God will put some honour upon them, and take some notice of them; and whom God honoureth we ought to honour. But Cyrus, meantime, was only the instrument; a sovereign God was the efficient cause of their deliverance, he armed Cyrus with invincible power, see verses 1-4. Here we see the sovereign power of God asserted, that

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though there should be nations and kings, and crooked places, and iron gates, in the way of the deliverance of God's people; yet when his time comes, he will shew his irresistible power in creating salvation for them, verses 5-8. Let God's children beware of thinking their case desperate, for God will create deliverance when it is needful, and nothing can withstand him. When we would come to God with our questions and demands, about the delivering of his people, or the recovering of his work, we are not to think it can be a difficulty to God, though there be mountains in the way. How easily can he effectuate what he allows us to demand? He can as easily bring about his work, as he can make the dew to fall down upon the grass, saying as here, verse 8, "Drop down, ye heaven, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it. He shall be as the dew to Israel," Hosea 14:5.

(b) As our demands ought to be in a way of acknowledging his absolute power and sovereignty; so also in a way of submission to him, and not in a way of striving with him, as you see, verses 9,10, "Woe to him that striveth with his Maker," &c. God allows us to wrestle with him; but it is a sin to strive with him, nay, we must stoop to him, and ask and have what we will.

QUESTION: When do people strive with God, instead of endeavouring to ask and demand regularly?

ANSWER: We strive with God, when we live in sin, contrary to the challenges of the word and Spirit; when we resist the motions of the Spirit, we strive with him when we come to ask counsel of him with our idols in our hearts, and with a resolution to hug them; we strive with him, when, notwithstanding of his large promises, we will not believe what he says; we strive with him, when, instead of pressing him with our demands, according to his word, we prescribe to him; and, instead of waiting on him, limit him to our time and way; we strive with him, when, instead of walking in his light, and according to the rule of his word, we follow our own light, or any false light, and not the word, but our own views and interpretations of the word, without explaining the word by the word.

Now, we see here two things, viz., that it is both dangerous and unnatural to strive with God.

1. It is dangerous, for it brings a woe upon men that do so, "Woe to him that striveth with his Maker." It brings even a woe upon the children of God themselves when they want due submission to him; it brings much mischief upon them, for, though the Lord pardon their sins, yet he may take vengeance upon their inventions. And they bring several woes upon their own heads. Woe to them, for thus they want still peace of conscience, and much sweet access to God with boldness, that otherwise they might enjoy. Woe to them, for they cut themselves off from many sweet expressions of God's love which otherwise they might have. Woe to them, for they bring heavy judgments, both

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temporal and spiritual, upon themselves; for though he will not take away his loving-kindness from his own, yet he will visit their iniquities with rods, and their transgressions with stripes," Psalm 89:32,33. But again,

2. As it is dangerous, so it is unnatural. For a thing that is made to strive with its Maker; for a creature to strive with its Creator; for the clay to strive with the potter-what more unnatural! God hath more superiority over us than the potter hath over the clay; are we equal matches to strive together? It is as if clay should strive with the potter, and blame his hand for not framing it aright. And further, how unnatural is it, as verse 10, for one to say to his father, "What begattest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth?" Shall a child call his parents to an account for his generation and birth? A child hath not so much its being of the parent, as we have ours of God, in whom we live, move, and have our being; and the mother doth not bear about the child so long before the world sees it, as God did bear about his children, in the eternal decree, before ever they came to the world.

Thus it is odious and unnatural to strive against God. When God, therefore, enjoins us to ask and

command, surely it is in a submissive way he requires us to do so; and when we see his sovereignty, and submit to it, then we ask and demand regularly and successfully. So much by way of caution.

3rdly, The third use is for examination and trial. You should examine yourselves before you go to, and after you come from, a communion table. Now, the best way of examining is to put the work in God's hand, and let him examine you. Ask God some questions concerning yourselves, the works of his hands, and see what he says of you. Put all questions that concern immortal souls upon God; and if you will put him to it, he will answer them. Here I will tell of a few questions, both for the natural man, and for the spiritual man.

1. For the natural man there are these two or three questions may be asked of God.

(a) What says God of the man that thought himself well qualified for going to the Lord's table, and thinks himself something, while yet he never saw himself to be a child of the devil by nature, nor ever knew what it is to be filled with self-aborrence upon a view of the glory of God? The Lord says to that man, "He that thinks himself to be something, while he is nothing, deceiveth himself," Galatians 6:3. self-conceit is self-deceit, and such a conceited person was not fit for God's table.

(b) What says God to that man, that thinks it an easy thing to communicate; that can do it as easily as he can sit down at his ordinary meal; and never found any difficulty in it; and wonders to hear God's people complaining of difficulties, oppositions, and temptations; but is ready to bless himself that he was never troubled with any of these things? God says of him, that while the strong man keeps the house, the goods are at peace, Luke 11:21. The devil was never banished out

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of that man's heart, otherwise he would find, as God's people do, all the devils in hell, and corruption of their bosom, opposing him; he was never yet in the straight way that leadeth to life.

(c) What says God to that man who never saw anything of the mystery of iniquity that is in his heart, nor knows the plagues of his own heart; but thinks always he had a good heart to God, and who thinks he was always so strong in holiness, that he was never such a great sinner as other people have been; that was always so strong in the faith, that he hath trusted in God all his days; and so strong in grace, that he was never afraid for the devil, or his works? The Lord says of that man, that he is an utter stranger to God and himself both. As to his good heart, God says, "He that trusts in his own heart is a fool," for, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." And as to his strength, that he boasts so mightily of, God says, "That even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the strong and the young man shall utterly fail," Isaiah 40:30; while "They that wait upon the Lord (under a sense of their own weakness) shall renew their strength." Such as thus put confidence in the flesh shall fall into ruin.

(d) What says God of these people, who think they do a great deal, when they go about the outside of ordinances and duties, and go to sermons and sacraments to keep up their good name, and the credit of a profession before the world? God says, "They have a name to live, and are dead;" and "That they have a form of godliness, but want the power of it;" and that "Many shall say to him in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not eaten and drunk in thy presence? to whom he will say, Depart from me, I know you not," Matthew 7:22,23.

(e) What says God of that man that ventured to a communion-table, and yet is grossly ignorant of the principles of religion, and immoral in his walk and conversation; being a habitual drunkard, swearer, liar, whoremonger, or the like? God says, "What hadst thou to do to declare my statutes, or to take my covenant in thy mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my law behind thy back?" Psalm 50:16. Yea, God says, "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body," 1 Corinthians 11:29.

(f) What says God of these that venture to the Lord's table, and yet never knew anything less or more of a work of grace upon their hearts; that know nothing of a law or gospel-work upon them; and that were never dead to the law, nor divested of their own righteousness in point of justification; that never were made to fly to the righteousness of Christ alone, as their only claim for heaven, and their only ground of acceptance with God? What says God of these that never knew anything of this, and yet ventured to God's table? God says, "Friend, how earnest thou in hither, not having the wedding-garment? Take him, bind him hand and foot, and cast him into utter darkness," Matthew 22:12,13.

(g) But what says God of all them who despise all these ordinances, word and sacraments, and give not a fig for them? God says to such, 28

"Behold, ye despisers, wonder and perish! If they that despised Moses' law did perish without mercy, of how much sorer punishment shall they be thought worthy, who have trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith Christ was sanctified and set apart, an unholy thing?" Hebrews 10:29. Do you thus spit upon God's face, and tell him you care not for his kindness, you care not though Christ had never died, and though his death were never remembered in the world? You thus excommunicate yourselves from grace and glory, and all the privileges of the Christian church.

2. There are some questions that concern the spiritual man, and which the poor believer would gladly ask God, if he durst. But seeing you cannot be satisfied till you hear God's mind about them, bring them forth.

(a) Then, what says God to a man that would gladly take hold of Christ, but fears there was never such a vile, base, ugly monster in all the world that came to Christ and got a welcome? God says, "All that the Father hath given me, shall come unto me: And he that cometh, be what he will, I will in no wise cast out. Though your sins be as scarlet, and crimson, ye shall be as white as snow." Though there was never one in the world like you, yet it is not the matchlessness of your condition that shall keep you out of heaven, it is unbelief. Therefore, be the case what it will, come, and welcome, to Christ. When you come to Christ, God gets satisfaction for all your sins, though they were a thousand times greater than you can imagine they are.

(b) What says God to a man that would willingly have Christ, and strike a bargain with him, but hath such experience of a deceitful and desperately wicked heart, that he fears he shall fall away again to the scandal of religion? God says, "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, that I will not turn away from you to do you good; but I will put my fear in your heart, that ye shall not depart from me." He says that, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins;" and therefore, "Though you fall, you shall arise; and though you sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto you;" only bargain honestly with him, and take him honestly, for holiness as well as for heaven; and sure I am, every honest believer will take him for sanctification as well as consolation. "No temptation shall take you, but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it," 1 Corinthians 10:13.

(c) What says God to a man, that, upon solid grounds, maintains his interest in Christ, and hath gotten it sealed to him now and then at a sacrament, yet the heart of him still goes a-whoring after some idols and sins, not only through infirmity, but oft-times with some degree of presumption, while he turns slothful and unwatchful? God says, "Though he will pardon their sins, yet he will take vengeance on your inventions. He will visit your iniquities with rods," and bruise you

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in the mortar of tribulation, till the juice of the old Adam be squeezed out of you: "yet his loving-kindness will he not utterly take away, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail; his covenant he will not break, nor alter the word that is gone out of his mouth," Psalm 89:32-34.

(d) What says God to a man that, with a humble boldness and holy fear, and brokenness of heart, is venturing, upon good ground, to own his interest in Christ, saying, "I am my Beloved's, and he is mine?" God says, "His desire is towards you. But let him that standeth take heed lest he fall." Go up from the wilderness leaning upon your Beloved.

(e) What says God to a person that is daily judging himself for an hypocrite and an atheist, and thereupon persuades himself that God will condemn him? God says that person is a liar; for, "He that judgeth himself shall not be judged;" God will never judge him, nor condemn him with the world, 1 Corinthians 11:31,32. Do you find yourself to be a self-condemned creature, and law-condemned, and see no shift in all the world for you, but Christ, as a ransom and propitiation, and think it a good shift too, and thereupon hath fled to him for refuge? There are two immutable things, the word and oath of God, wherein it is impossible for God to lie, that stand firmer than the pillars of heaven for thy strong consolation.

(f) What says God to a person who, upon examination, finds all wrong with him, and yet ventures upon the mercy of God in Christ, against all hope, and against all appearances? God says, That you are one of the most trusty friends that he hath in all the world; you are a true child of Abraham, the friend of God. "They that trust in the Lord shall be like mount Zion, which cannot be removed," etc. Put all these, and such like questions to God, and he will answer them.

4thly, The fourth use I designed was for exhortation, which I only offer in a word. If God allows you, and enjoins you to pose him with your doubts, and press him with your commands, then let all know their privilege here, and make use of it. Obey his call, "Ask of him things to come, concerning his sons, and concerning the work of his hands, command ye him;" press him, and put him to it, for his church, for her children, and for yourselves.

1. For his church. Plead with him that all lands, to which he hath a mind to do good, may have breasts, and may be spoken for, Song 8:8. O let your desires be enlarged both for your elder and younger sisters, Ezekiel 16:61; your elder sister the Jews, and your younger sister the Gentiles. Plead with him that all the enemies of Zion may be put to shame, Isaiah 12:11,12. etc. O sirs, lift up a prayer for the remnant that is left; and plead with him, that he would raise up a generation of faithful pastors in this land, and send them out of his own bosom; such as may not think shame to own a covenanted work of reformation, but may zealously appear for the reviving and restoring of it, and that will keep the good old way, and not disturb the church of Christ with new notions and principles; and since witnessing work and covenanting work is the work of God, the work of his hands, therefore put his own

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work in his own hand; let us not take it out of his hand, nor take it into ours, or put it into men's hands; it will be marred there: but put him to it, to carry on his own work with his own hand of power. He must build the temple, and bear the glory. Plead that heavy yokes may be taken off the church's neck, such as yet she groans under; and deliverance may be commanded for Jacob. It is true, God hath

delivered us from the dreadful disturbance that was in this country by a wicked insurrection, since the last year; but this deliverance, if we be not duly thankful, is but a blink before a shower, as long as no reformation takes place, and the power of godliness is under such a dismal decay among us: "There was silence in heaven for half an hour," Revelation 8:1, rest in the church for a little time, but quickly followed the sound of the seven trumpets," verse 2. But,

2. As you would press God, and put him to it for the mother, so also for her children. Plead for the spirit of love and unity among ministers and people. Plead that the Lord may save his servants and people from every temptation that tends to the marring of his work. Satan's assaults to undermine reformation-work may be busked up with high pretensions to zeal for the honour of Christ; that, for example, he may not suffer shame or dishonour in the world; as when Peter said, Matthew 16:22, "Far be it from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee." But Christ, who saw the devil's black and foul hand under this white and fair glove, says to him, "Get thee behind me, Satan." No doubt, it was out of real love to Christ, and zeal for his honour, that Peter spake, while he was not aware of the enemy; but it is to be remarked, that when Satan prompts any to speak for Christ's honour in one respect, he means and designs to dishonour him in another.

But this I wave. Again, plead that the spirit of sleep and slumber may be put off the children; that a drooping, drowsy generation may be awakened. Plead that the children may get all an insatiable desire to gain others that are without. Alas! sirs, are there not vast numbers of graceless, Christless, unconverted sinners among us, together with formalists and hypocrites, in whom God is not in all their thoughts, and in whom the strong man hath his lodging? Should we not, by our prayers and pains, endeavour what we can to spoil hell and fill heaven?

3. Let us press him, and put him to it, for ourselves. Let us "seek the Lord and his strength; seek his strength for evermore." Plead that you may be cleansed from all idols, according to his promise, Ezekiel 36:25, "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." And plead the pouring out of the promised Spirit; "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.-I will pour out my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." There will never be good days amongst us till the Spirit be poured out from on high.

Now, these are things that concern his sons, and are according to his will, being things that he hath promised; therefore, let us command our King to command these things for us; "Thou art my King, O God:

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command deliverance for Jacob." Why, say you, it is only his people and children that are thus charged: and I do not know if I be among the number of these. I tell you, sirs, you are all welcome to put God to his word; shift not the call; God here directs his speech to all who are capable to know or understand it. 1. It is directed to all such as understand that God is *the Lord*; "Thus saith the Lord." 2. It is directed to all who look upon him as a *holy God*, and a God in covenant with Israel; "Thus saith the holy One of Israel." 3. It is directed to all that know God as their *Maker*; "Thus saith thy Maker." 4. It is directed to all that have any questions to ask. 5. It is directed to all that have any concern about God's sons, and the work of his hands. 6. It is directed to all that have anything ado with God, or any service for him; "Command ye me." All these he presses to employ him; and if you do it not, you sin against him, as he is *the Lord*, as he is *the holy One of Israel*, and as he is *your Maker*; you sin against him in all the relations in which he stands to you. Therefore, in his lawful authority, I charge you to ask him, and put him to it, who is both powerful and willing to do all for you.

It may be, you have essayed this work formerly, without success, and now you conceive things to be desperate, and any more essays to be needless. Know, sirs, that God is not bound to keep your time; but he hath bound himself to fulfil his own word of promise in his own time. Therefore, do not limit him, but press him, and put him to it; and, for what you know, his time may be at or after this occasion, to give you all that you ask and demand.

If you would ask and demand with success, I give you only this direction. There is one whom he heareth always-that is, Christ the Mediator, to whom he hath given a commission, to ask and command what he will concerning his sons, and all the works of his hands, saying to him, as in Psalm 2:8, "Ask me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utmost ends of the earth for thy possession." Therefore, put all your demands and commands in this Mediator's hand; send a letter of faith and prayer to him, even though, when you are writing the letter, the devil may come and jog your hand, and make it all full of blots and blurs, yet he can read it, and make sense of it; yea, he will write it over, as it were, in a fair hand, and let his Father see all the questions and commands you have in it; he will make them his own requests; he will ask and command for you, and so you shall have what you will.

Notes:

1. This Sermon was preached at Glasgow, on Monday, July 21st, 1746, after the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered there: and enlarged at Burntisland, on Monday 28th of the same month, after an occasion of the same nature there.
2. Which was the subject of the Action-sermon preached the preceding day, by the Rev. Mr. Fisher.

3. Which was the subject of the sermon delivered immediately before this, by our author's brother, the Rev. Mr. Ebenezer Erskine.