

The Peace of God Keeping the Heart and Mind

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, May 25, 1862

"Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ." Philippians 4:6, 7

Unbelief is the stoutest, strongest limb of the old man of sin, and therefore the direst foe and sorest plague of every child of grace. As by faith we take hold of God's strength, embrace the promises, and fight that good fight in which, however prolonged may be the contest, victory in the end is certain, faith may be called the right arm of the new man of grace. And as unbelief puts far away the evil day, thrusts back the truth of God, and fights that evil fight, of which, though prolonged with most undying obstinacy, the end is certain defeat, unbelief may be called the right arm of the old man of sin. Thus we see how widely these two opposing principles, faith and unbelief, differ from each other; in fact, we may say that they differ in every point of contact or comparison. They differ in their birth and parentage; in their growth and development; in their nurture and education; in their food and appetite; in their dress and appearance; in their ways and habits; and in their final issue and last end. Let me, however, for the sake of clearness and distinctness, illustrate these points of opposition at greater length.

Faith, as the hymn says, "owes its birth to sovereign grace," and is begotten by the same power, and at the same moment, as that whereby and that wherein the Lord the Spirit quickens the soul into spiritual and eternal life. It has

indeed a high and heavenly parentage, as deriving its birth and being from the Father of lights, from whom cometh every good and every perfect gift. Unbelief, however, is its elder in age, for, as a limb of the old man of sin, it first sprang into existence on that sad and fatal day when Adam sinned and fell. We can thus trace its lineage back to Adam's loins, and, as a part of our miserable inheritance from him, it lay with us in our mother's womb when we were "in sin and shapen in iniquity." Faith is born, like the babe in nature, weak and feeble, but it early sucks the breasts of consolation, thrives upon the pure milk of the word, and, when it can eat and digest strong meat, grows in some cases so strong as to be able to "thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and make the hills as chaff;" yea, in one instance, as fully authenticated in an ancient record, was powerful enough to overcome God and to prevail over the strength of Israel. (Gen. 32:28; Hosea 12:3, 4.) Unbelief is born vicious, like one of our English kings, crook-backed Richard, with teeth already in its head; grows up stubborn and obstinate, and, when it comes to mature age, is another Richard in ambition, crime, and cruelty. Faith goes early to school—to the best of all schools, the school of Jesus; is from its tenderest years docile and teachable; loves to sit in the best of all places, at the Redeemer's feet, there meekly and affectionately listening when he says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." Nor does it leave him for any other teacher, but goes on learning fresh lessons from those lips into which grace was poured, until it is conformed to his suffering image, and then, transformed into sight, rises to see him as he is face to face. Unbelief goes to that large public school of which the prince and god of this world is the head master, where it has for its school-fellows the Lust of the flesh, the Lust of the eye, and the Pride of life; takes its degrees in the infidel university of Darkness; and, fortified by learning and strengthened by the

arguments of carnal reasoning, daily becomes more inveterate in obstinacy and enmity against the truth of God, till ultimately it dies in its sins, and often yields up its miserable life in the very jaws of despair. Faith is very choice in its food from its very birth; loves the pure milk of the word, for nothing else in tender years agrees with its delicate constitution; and, when it can eat meat, nothing delights it so much and makes it so fat and flourishing as the flesh and blood of the Lamb. But unbelief, as born with teeth, always chooses the toughest morsels it can find, though it is never able to digest them, as is plainly evident from its mangy hide and lean and lanky condition. But as an ass loves to browse upon thistles and a vulture seeks after carrion, so unbelief is ever hunting after objections, difficulties, and perplexing questions; is never better pleased than when it can mumble over a hard, dry bone, and when it finds it too strong for its own teeth, to throw it down to break the jaws of others. Faith loves to be clean. Well knowing and deeply feeling nature's filth and pollution, it loves to wash in the fountain open for all sin and all uncleanness; to bathe in the river of regeneration and sanctification; and, when cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, it delights in being dressed in the choice apparel of Christ's righteousness. Unbelief loves to be dirty; neither washes its skin nor clothes; delights, as the swine, to wallow in the mire; and like a beggarly tramp, nothing pleases it better than its own righteousness, which, according to God's testimony, is but "filthy rags." Faith's ways are good ways: she chooses the path of righteousness, and finds no rest for her feet except on the King's highway, the way of holiness; loves the company of God's people, is the enemy of the world, and the friend of God. Unbelief loves to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, to stand in the way of sinners and to sit in the seat of the scornful; is the friend of the world and the enemy of God. And as their ways, so their end. The end of faith is the salvation of the soul. The end of unbelief is

everlasting damnation; and perishing as it were by its own hands, it often, like Saul of old, falls upon its own sword, and dies under the wrath of the Almighty.

But, you will say, "What has all this to do with the text?" I answer, much every way. Our text, graciously understood and rightly interpreted, is a blow aimed directly at the head of unbelief, and a blessed help and encouragement to faith. Faith finds in it choice picking; unbelief mumbles over it like a dog over a well-gnawed bone, though it is too strong for it to break, and too hard for it to digest. Faith can say, in the language of the text, "Be careful for nothing;" unbelief mutters, "Be careful for everything." Faith says, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Unbelief murmurs, "What can prayer do for me? Can prayer feed a hungry body? Can supplication fill a lean cupboard? Can thanksgiving bring me an increasing business, send me good customers, buy for me cheap, and sell for me dear? Can going on my knees amuse my mind, feed my lusts, or put money into my pocket? No. Give me a good handsome independence, plenty of the world, and health and strength to enjoy it. And as to prayer, if ever I should want it, nothing can be better than the Common Prayer Book, or the old prayers that my mother taught me when I ran by her side as a child." Faith says, "The peace of God passeth all understanding; and O may that peace keep my heart and mind through Christ Jesus." Unbelief says, "I know nothing and care to know nothing about the peace of God keeping either heart or mind. I would rather keep my carriage, or keep a good balance at my bankers; or if I cannot fly so high as that, be comfortably kept by a good farm, a good shop, or good wages, hoping after all I may go to heaven just as well as those people who make such a fuss about religion."

But, without further dwelling on these points, I shall, with God's help and blessing, take the side of faith this morning, and aim, if I can, some home thrusts against unbelief; and in this attempt to side with God's friend and thrust at God's foe, I shall endeavour to bring before you three leading points which I seem to see in the text before us.

I.—*First*, a gracious *caution*: "*Be careful for nothing.*"

II.—*Secondly*, a comprehensive *precept*: "But in everything by *prayer and supplication* with thanksgiving let *your requests be made known unto God.*"

III.—*Thirdly*, an encouraging *promise*: "And the *peace of God*, which passeth all understanding, shall *keep your hearts and minds* through Christ Jesus."

I.—Let us first consider the gracious caution addressed to the saints of God, "*Be careful for nothing.*"

i. Must we take these words in their full and literal extent? Are we to abandon all thought for the future? Is no provision whatever to be made for one's self or one's family? That would be contrary to common sense; and though the word of God is *above* common sense, it is never *contrary* to it. In fact, what should we do, or what would become of us as men and women in this world if we were to carry out the words of the text as strictly and as literally as the words might be strained to signify? Many of us have our bread to earn, and that by the daily sweat of our brains or our brow. If this direction to be "careful for nothing" were taken to its full extent; if the merchant paid no attention to his books; if the tradesman took no notice of his shop or customers; if the farmer neglected going about his farm, left his ploughing and sowing to manage themselves; or, to take lower ground, if

the labourer lay in bed, saying, "Let the morrow take thought for itself, I shall not get up to go to work this morning. Am I not told to be careful for nothing? Why need I then care to finish my job, serve my master, or get bread for my family?" What would be the issue? Why, the merchant would soon be in the *London Gazette*, the tradesman in the County Court, the farmer in the Queen's gaol, and the labourer in the parish Union. We cannot, then, take the words in their full literal extent, so as to exclude all care and all thought for the things of time and sense. Why, in fact, the very food we have eaten this morning; the very clothes we have on; the very place of divine worship in which we have met; the very pulpit in which I stand; and I might add, even the very Bible from which I preach, as a book printed by human hands, are all the fruit of care, industry, and skill, and have all sprung from the exercise of prudential forethought. But not only is it contrary to common sense to bestow no thought or care upon the concerns of this life, but to other parts also of God's word; and we know that precept can never clash with precept, or Scripture contradict Scripture. Do we not read, "Owe no man anything?" (Rom. 13:8.) But how could you fulfil that precept if you did not take care, and very often most anxious care, to make both ends meet? A man might say, as many loose professors have said by deed, if not in word, Be careful for nothing. It does not matter what I spend, what I beg, or what I borrow, how extravagantly I live, or how deeply I sink in debt. I am careful for nothing; no; not even for the interest of my family, or my own good name, or my character as a Christian. Let me only have plenty to eat and drink, it matters little to me what may be the bills of baker or brewer, the claims of my landlord, or my debt to the grocer. God is able to keep me without my being so anxious not to get into debt, or, if I do, he can soon raise me up a rich friend to pay all my debts for me."

Take another text of similar purport: "If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." (1 Tim. 5:8.) Then not to use every effort of honest industry to provide for one's own immediate family, and one's own house, is according to the apostle's declaration, to act worse and be worse than a man who denies the faith altogether, and is at open war with God and godliness.

But take another text bearing upon the same point; "Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." (2 Cor. 8:21.) But how is a man to do this in this day of eager competition, and at this advanced era of active civilisation and untiring industry, unless he labour, according to the original curse, with the daily sweat dropping off his brow, and take every lawful means, according to his station in life, to make that honourable provision for his family which shall shield them from the keen stings of poverty, and even in the sight of men procure them that general respect which so becomes a profession of religion?

But we are also told to be "not slothful in business." (Rom. 12:12.) The gospel has a purifying influence upon everything which it touches. It thus carries itself into the very domain of business, professional or mechanical, and hallows and sanctifies industry of mind or hand in every station of life.

But as indulgence in slothfulness and carelessness would be utterly to pervert our text, and be not only contrary to common sense but to the clear precepts of God's word, it is not worth while to spend breath in exposing any further an error like this.

The great error, unhappily, lies on the opposite side. There

are many more anxious for everything than those who are careful for nothing in the sense that I have just explained it. For one who perverts the text to the service of sloth, there are ten who break it to the service of carking care and covetous anxiety. Let me, then, endeavour to show you the real meaning of the gracious caution, "Be careful for nothing."

ii. And first let me explain the *literal* meaning of the word. It does not signify, in the original, care and forethought, but a mind, as it were, "cut asunder," or what we call racked and torn with anxious care. Neither, in its primary meaning, then, nor in its spiritual application, does it exclude or forbid necessary care, honest and unceasing industry, or discourage that prudential management of our worldly affairs which is often a merciful gift of God, and on which, as such, his blessing usually rests. Amongst the heavenly graces and divine gifts bestowed upon that "virtuous woman," whose price is far above rubies, is that "she worketh willingly with her hands, looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness." (Prov. 31:13, 27.) But all this may be done without being bowed down by anxiety, which after all is but the fruit of unbelief. To be "careful for nothing," spiritually viewed, specially excludes those carking cares, those gnawing anxieties, those constant questionings whether the Lord can provide for the coming morrow, which to many form an unceasing source of that sorrow of the world which worketh death. Could we look into many gracious hearts we should see lying in their bosom many a carking, gnawing, biting, burning care, which, as a smouldering flame, is consuming their very vitals. This is not faith but unbelief; not the warm influence of a holy flame of heavenly love, but a smoke that darkens the mind and spreads a lowering cloud over the new man of grace in the heart. The apostle, then, meeting that unbelieving spirit, that

God-dishonouring besetment, says, "Be careful for nothing." Be not ever racked and torn with anxiety how the rent is to be paid; how an expiring bill is to be met; how the family is to be educated; how the dear children are to be provided for; what will become of them when you die; who then is to take care and charge of the little ones, and be to them a parent and a friend. To be thus racked and torn with unceasing anxiety, just as if there were no God in heaven who had so long fed and clothed you, or that when you died God would die with you—*that* is the biting, gnawing, over-anxious carefulness against which the apostle gives us a gracious caution. And dare we say that it is a needless one? For do we not see how many gracious persons of small incomes and large families, seem often much more tried about the concerns of the perishing body than the interests of the immortal soul?

iii. But let us take higher ground. Let us leave the valley and mount a little up the hill, to get, if we can, a view of Zion's towers and bulwarks, and be thus somewhat raised above the mists and fogs of this lower ground, the swamp, the morass, and the flooded fen, where we have just been lingering among its agueish, shivering inhabitants. Even on the higher ground of the soul's eternal interests, there is often many an unbelieving, God-dishonouring, anxious care against which the Blessed Spirit would drop a salutary caution.

1. Do you not see, for instance, sometimes a *heavy trial in the distance*? Filled with unbelief and fear, you scarcely know how that trial is to be endured when it shall come into closer view, and fall with crushing weight upon you. You see it now only just looming in the far distance. At present, perhaps, it is like the cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, which the prophet's servant saw from Carmel's woody top. But as you

gaze upon it, you see it, in fact or figure, in reality or imagination, spreading itself gradually over the sky, and you scarcely know whether there may not come out of that dark cloud a lightning shaft or a pealing storm of rain and hail which may sweep you off your feet. But are you not making a trial of the trial before it really comes? How do you know whether the clouds may not break and the threatened storm pass away? Or even supposing the storm should come, have you not found support under every past trial? Has not strength been always given you according to your day? Did any affliction ever overtake you in which the Lord did not give you the needed support? Why, then, anxiously forecast the coming morrow, and sink with doubt and fear in the prospect that when the trial overtakes you, you will not have strength to bear up under the rushing storm? "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof!" But take one instance of this as an illustration of my meaning. Many of the dear family of God have looked to a dying bed with much fear and anxiety how their evidences for eternity then might stand the threatened storm; whether the Lord would then shine in beams of mercy upon their soul; would they then leave a blessed testimony behind that the Lord was the strength of their heart and their portion forever; would Jesus be with them in his blood, love, and power, when the cold sweat sat upon their brow and the rattles in their throat sounded the near approach of the grim king of terrors? And yet how many of the dear saints of God who, as the apostle says, "through fear of death were all their life time subject to bondage," have made a blessed end when the appointed season to depart came near! When dying time came, dying faith came with it. The Lord was with them when they passed through the gloomy valley of the shadow of death; his rod and staff supported them all the way through it, and they found strength for a dying body to yield up without pain its last breath, and support for a never-dying soul to pass in sweet assurance into the arms of its God.

2. But take another case, that of *temptation*. When temptation begins to work—and temptation often begins by small degrees—many a saint of God has trembled with apprehension what that temptation might prove to be to him when it assumed greater strength. Has not sometimes an infidel temptation darted as it were through your mind like a lightning flash? Or a sensual temptation toward a particular object may have just begun to entangle the roving eye and the wandering heart. A child of God from past bitter experience knows his own weakness, and what he is in the presence of temptation; how unable to stand against it, how soon overmastered by it. If the Lord, then, do not appear with the temptation to make a way to escape, he trembles at the consequences for his soul's security and peace. Our blessed Lord had an eye to this when he said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat." (Luke 22:31.). But even here there may be undue anxiety. As I asked you before as regards trial, have you not found also in the matter of temptation that with the temptation God made a way to escape, so that you were able to bear it? Why, then, forecast temptations to come, trembling beforehand that they may prove your downfall, when you have in your own bosom the proof that you have been supported under temptations past, and have found the Lord faithful to his promise in bringing you safely through them?

3. Or take again such a case as your present *state* and *standing* in divine matters. Many of the Lord's dear family are sorely tried with doubts and fears of their interest in Christ from almost the beginning of their course down to the very end of their days. Either from the weakness of their faith, or from want of clear manifestations and blessed deliverances, it is a fact that many of the Lord's quickened family are pressed down all their days with anxious questionings as to

their state and standing before God for eternity. But the Lord would say to them, as a gracious caution against being overborne by these doubts and fears, "Be careful for nothing." It is good to be well and deeply exercised about the important interests of our soul, and never to rest satisfied with anything short of a sweet assurance of our interest in the atoning blood and justifying righteousness of the Son of God. But may I not ask you this question in all faithfulness and in all friendliness, "Do you find any real soul-profit in always questioning the work of grace upon your heart; in ever doubting whether God has done anything for you by his Spirit and grace; in ever yielding to the suggestions of unbelief, and giving way to Satan when he would persuade you you were a hypocrite?" You know how much opposed I am to a dead assurance, and how I am continually insisting upon this point that the Lord alone can speak peace to the soul. But I also say this, that I, for my part, never got anything by doubting; that all that I have got I have got by believing; and that though doubts and fears will continually work in my mind as well as in yours, yet that they are neither fruits of the Spirit nor have anything to do with the work of faith, the patience of hope, or the labour of love. When, then, Satan would bring against you every evidence to condemn and hide every evidence to acquit, it will be your wisdom if you can speak to him as the three children said of old to the Chaldean King, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods." (Dan. 3:16, 18.) So you, in a sense, may, if the Lord help you, meet Satan even upon this ground, and say, "O king of darkness, I am not careful to answer thee in this matter. I cannot and will not, at thy bidding, give up my hope that the Lord has done something for my soul, and

made himself precious to my heart in the past. There let me take my stand. He is able to deliver me from the burning, fiery furnace which you would cast me into. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king over all the children of pride, that I will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. If I must perish, I will perish at the Lord's feet, fighting against thee and thy evil ways to the very last moment of my expiring breath."

II.—But I now pass on from this gracious caution, "Be careful for nothing," which I may say, by the way, has the same meaning as our Lord's direction, "Take no thought" [the word being exactly the same in the original] "for the morrow," to the consideration of the *comprehensive precept*, which seems to meet the case of every child of God: "But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

We never can be sufficiently thankful for a throne of grace to which we may freely resort, for a footstool of mercy before which we may, from time to time, reverently present ourselves. The heavenly blessedness, the abundant grace, the rich compassion, the boundless love displayed to the children of men in setting his dear Son on a throne of grace in the courts above, are not sufficiently valued and prized. The very simplicity of the blessing, like the blessings of sun and air in nature, or food and raiment in providence, makes us almost forget its greatness. Let us, then, cast a glance upward at this throne of grace, that we may take a view of it by faith, before we enter more largely upon the prayer and supplication made before it. God has raised his dear Son from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places that he might be our ever-living Mediator between God and man; that, as the great High Priest over the house of God, he might ever, by the virtue of blood shed

here below, perfume the courts of heaven; that he might present the prayers and supplications of his people, together with his own prevailing incense, and thus offer the prayers of all the saints as a spiritual sacrifice upon the golden altar of his own sacred humanity. This intercession of Jesus we should ever bear in mind in approaching the throne of grace, and thus, in drawing near to the footstool of mercy unto the Father, not come in our own strength, wisdom, goodness, or righteousness, but only draw near to the Father through the Son of his love, in whom he is ever well pleased. To believe this, and act upon it, is a most needful and blessed part of our most holy faith and gracious obedience. As, therefore, and experimentally, this spiritual mystery is opened up to a believing heart, it draws forth the secret desires and prayers of the soul; and thus the believing disciple is enabled, from time to time, according to the measure of his faith, and the pouring out upon him of the Spirit of grace and of supplications, to act upon and to fulfil this comprehensive precept, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." I have said that it is *comprehensive*: let us now, then, look at it in its various bearings, and that will give us the best idea how all-embracing it is.

1. Take the first word, and see how it stretches itself forth over the whole family of God in every state or condition, and seems to embrace, as with loving arms, everything in providence or in grace that can befall the Christian. Look at the words "*In everything*." How large they are! How full they stand! What a warrant they give for a child of God to bring everything before the eyes and ears of his heavenly Father. You will say, "Everything! Why there are so many trifling things, as I consider them. May I bring trifling things before God as well as important things?" What do you mean by trifling things? Don't you know that the most important

events hang upon the most trifling circumstances? Is anything trifling with God which concerns the salvation and sanctification of an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ? With God, nothing is little; with God, nothing is great. With him, the world itself and all the nations that dwell upon the face of it, are but the drop of a bucket and the small dust of the balance. Measured by human eye, this thing is trifling and that thing is important. Measured by the eye of God, all things are alike. He that made the elephant made the mite. He that created leviathan to bask in the sea made the fish in whose mouth Peter found the tribute money. He that created the cedar of Lebanon made the hyssop of the wall. I have found in my own experience some of the most important events of my life to have depended upon the most trifling circumstances. A scarcely perceptible elevation of the soil may, at its first source, divert a brook into a new channel, and thus throw a river into an wholly unexpected course, yet one full of blessing to the land through which it flows. I could, if time or place admitted, show you on what a trifling circumstance my call by grace, and, with it, all its consequences to myself and the Church of God depended. A casual circumstance at Oxford, now nearly thirty-seven years ago, threw the whole current of my heart and soul, my thoughts and life into their present channel. Thus we never can measure a circumstance by its present bearing. Measured by your faith or even by your prevailing unbelief, it may seem of little significance; but if it be of God, it is not insignificant in his eyes, but may have a most important bearing upon your salvation and sanctification. But will this refer to providence as well as to grace? "May I," you ask, "take everything in providence before the Lord, everything as regards my family, everything as regards myself? Have I a warrant to lay everything that concerns me before the all-seeing eye of him who sits at God's right hand, believing he will look upon it with gracious eye?" Yes; just as much as

when the ancient prophet, who was stoned between the temple and the altar, said, with expiring breath, "The Lord look upon it and require it" (2 Chron. 24:22); so may you ask the Lord to look upon every circumstance that lies upon your heart. Did not Hezekiah spread the letter with *all* its contents before the Lord in the temple that he might read the writing? So may not you spread before the Lord every vowel and consonant, so to speak, of the letter of your soul? Yes; there is not a single circumstance which can transpire in providence or in grace, that really concerns the good of your soul which you may not freely and fully take and lay before the eyes of him with whom you have to do. If we consider his majesty and greatness, is it not infinite condescension in the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, to look upon us at all, to listen to us at all, to hear the prayers of any upon this earthly ball? If, then, it be condescension to look upon the greatest, it is but condescension to look upon the least; if it be condescension to hear the most earnest cry, it is but the same condescension to hear the feeblest sigh. Nothing can be insignificant and nothing can be unimportant that concerns the salvation of an immortal soul, glorifies God, or brings a revenue of praise to the Son of his love.

2. But now look at the apostle's expression, "*by prayer and supplication.*" We often find these two words united in Scripture. Take the following instances: "Then hear thou from the heavens their prayer and the supplications" (2 Chron. 6:); "I set my face unto the Lord God to seek by prayer and supplications." (Dan. 9:3.) So our blessed Lord, as our great exemplar, is said, in the days of his flesh, to have offered up "prayers and supplications" (Heb. 5:7); and, following his holy example, the eleven disciples, after his ascension, all "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." (Acts 1:14.) But though thus frequently joined, there is a distinction still to be discerned between them.

Prayer comprehends every breathing of the soul, from the feeblest desire, the faintest sigh, and the most tender wish, to the utmost and intensest earnestness, such as Jacob displayed when he wrestled all night with the angel at Peniel. It includes, therefore, all mental prayer and all vocal prayer. Thus, all private prayer, all public prayer, every desire of the heart, all utterance of the mouth, which the blessed Spirit is pleased to raise up by his powerful breath in the soul, or to prompt with the tongue, *that* we may call, in a scriptural sense, "prayer." Supplication seems to imply something more broken and interrupted; something more poured out with groans and tears and agonising cries. The posture of a suppliant is more humble, his wants more urgent, and his requests more fervent than those of a petitioner. Thus, in the passage which I have already quoted, where our blessed Lord is said to have offered up prayers and supplications, we find added, "with strong crying and tears." When he prayed in calm majesty, as in John 17., *that* was prayer; when in the garden, "being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly," *that* was supplication. Supplication, therefore, goes beyond prayer, as being more earnest, more agonising, more vehement, more importunate, more breathed out with weeping and groaning. Thus the Lord says of his people, "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them." To use a figure which I have before employed in one of my sermons, prayer is like a calm, deep river, which flows through a level country to the sea; but supplication resembles a mountain torrent, which rushes impetuously to the same ocean, but is broken with rocks strewed in its bed, which cannot stay, though they may impede, its course. Each is of the Spirit, as the water of river and torrent is the same; and each is suitable to different circumstances of the soul. But whether it be prayer or whether it be supplication, we are bidden here, "In everything by prayer and supplication to let our requests be made known unto God." The blessed

Spirit, in his various influences as a Spirit of grace and supplications in the hearts of God's people, to use another figure, may be compared to the wind. Sometimes it blows a scarcely perceptible breeze. The warm and gentle south wind on some days, falls upon our faces as fresh and sweet as if it had just passed over a bank of violets. So prayer sometimes in the soul is a gentle, warm aspiration heavenward, and yet, as being the breath of the Spirit, has in it a sweetness sensibly felt and a power that lifts up the heart into the presence of God. At another time the soul is cast into a very difficult position, lies under the pressure of a heavy affliction, or is assailed by a grievous temptation; then prayer becomes more like the rushing, mighty wind which was heard on the day of Pentecost. If the gentle breeze of which I have just spoken speeds the ship of the soul gently over the wave, the more powerful breeze which I am now describing more resembles the strong wind that puts every sail of the vessel in motion, and bears her rapidly over the rough sea. But whether gentle breeze or strong gale, do not both bear her on to the same harbour? Sometimes again prayer may be mingled with tears and groans and sighs, just like a stormy day, when wind and rain seem to strive with each other for the mastery. This turns prayer into supplication; for, as I said before, supplication is stronger than prayer, more repeated, broken, continual, earnest, and more poured forth as if the answer must come immediately, or the soul could not live under the agonizing pressure of guilt and temptation. We are not, therefore, to limit prayer and supplication to any one point or to any one degree, any more than we can fix all the family of God to the same spiritual stature, or limit faith in every bosom to the same exact dimensions. In the family of God, we have babes and children, young men and fathers. In faith, we have weak faith, little faith, much faith, strong faith, and overcoming faith. So in prayer, we similarly have weak prayer and strong prayer; prayer mingled with much

faith and prayer mingled with little faith; prayer that seems breathed forth out of the heart with a gentle sigh, and prayer earnest, vehement, and importunate, that struggles forth with a labouring groan. We cannot lay down any scale of prayer, any precise standard, any fixed dimensions, as though the operations and influence of the Spirit could be squared by the size of a pocket prayer-book, or made to fit into the Practice of Piety or the New Week's Preparation for the Sacrament. It would be to lay a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, to insist that there must be just that precise measure of the Spirit of prayer and supplications, or that amount of it, or that frequency of it which man in his ignorance or his arrogance would prescribe. God does not tie himself to give his Spirit in equal measure to all; for "there are diversities of operations" (1 Cor. 12:6); and we have "gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, according as God deals to every man the measure of faith." (Rom. 12:3, 6.) If we then move in the footsteps of God's truth, we must not tie ourselves or others down to any rigid rule, but believe that every movement of the Spirit of intercession in the soul is prayer and supplication such as the Lord hears and answers.

But though I say this, I cannot help expressing my opinion how lamentably deficient are we here! How, under some temporal trial, you can go to a fellow sinner, and din his ear by telling him what a poor, afflicted creature you are, how sick in body, or how tried in circumstances, until you weary him and yourself with a thrice-told tale of misery and woe; and yet when you get home you have neither heart nor tongue to tell the same tale to God. Then you wonder how it is that day by day you get no good, no relief, no help, no support. Here all of us, I may say, most lamentably fail; for such is the desperate state of man by the fall, so careless is he and so prayerless, that nothing but the continual pouring

out of a Spirit of grace and of supplications can move and enable the heart to act upon this comprehensive precept, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."

"But what," it may be objected, "does not God know what we need before we ask him? Is his eye not open upon the hearts of his people to know all they want before they tell him? Where, then, is the use or necessity of spreading our wants before him?" Yes; the Lord knoweth all things; he searcheth all hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men. Yet still he would have us make our requests known unto him. Nor does he take it very kindly of us, if indeed we are his children, not to tell him all our need. If you had a particular friend, and you had learnt something from another quarter about a peculiar trial that he was suffering under, and he professed to be very intimate with and much attached to you, yet day after day when he came to see you he never told you that trial, or hinted so much as a word about it, should you not think either that he did not much feel the trial, or had not much affection for you, or confidence in you? Similarly, if you are suffering under a spiritual trial or heavy temptation, God knows it, as your friend might know your earthly trial; but if you never tell him the trial or the temptation under which you are suffering, it would seem as if either you did not very deeply feel it, or that there was not much intimacy, or confidence, or friendly intercourse, or communion between you and the Lord. We are bidden, then, to make our requests known unto God—not as if we believed he did not know them beforehand; but to spread them out before his holy eye, that we may have the privilege of presenting, and *He* the blessedness of granting, the petition desired. Did not the Lord know the blasphemous message of Sennacherib before Hezekiah took it up to the Temple? Did not God hear the words drop from the lips of Sennacherib

before the scribe wrote them down? Yet Hezekiah went up unto the house of God, and there spread the blasphemous roll with all its contents before the Lord, that the Lord might look upon it. So the Lord thoroughly sees all that is written upon the scroll of your heart before you unroll it in his presence and spread the whole before his eye. But still he would have you unroll the scroll and make your requests known unto him, because he takes it kindly of his people that they should believe his word and seek his face. It shows that they have confidence in him; it betokens some tender intimacy, some humble and gracious intercourse when they come, in all friendliness and holy boldness, yet with reverential awe and godly fear, to spread their requests before his footstool.

3. But with prayer and supplication is to be joined "*thanksgiving*." If the Lord has ever bestowed upon us any favours in providence, or any blessings in grace—and if he has not, what right have we to believe ourselves his children?—those mercies should not lie buried in forgetfulness. Among the sins ascribed by the apostle to the heathen is that, "when they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were *thankful*." (Rom. 1:21.) As believers in Christ, we are bidden "to abound in faith with *thanksgiving*" (Col. 2:7), and "to continue in prayer and watch in the same with *thanksgiving*." (Col. 4:2.) Nay, God says himself to his people, "Offer unto God *thanksgiving*" (Psa. 50:14), and bids us "enter into his gates with *thanksgiving* and into his courts with praise; to be thankful unto him and bless his name." (Psa. 100:4.) Ingratitude between man and man is a grievous though common evil; but what shall we say of ingratitude to God? Is it not a blessed frame when we can "sing and make melody in our heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ?" (Eph. 5:19, 20.) In fact,

thanksgiving, prayer, and supplication must all unite, as in music, to form melodious harmony. The treble of thanksgiving, the tenor of prayer, and the bass of supplication all harmonise together to make up the music of saints, as they harp with their golden harps and sing, as it were, a new song before the throne.

III.—But I must leave this delightful theme to speak a few words upon our third point, *the encouraging promise*: "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." O what a promise, how full and how blessed! Let us look at it in detail, for every point and part of it are full of grace and glory.

1. Observe its name. It is called "*the peace of God.*" Why so? Because God is its eternal author. One of his most blessed titles is "the God of peace" (Heb. 13:20); and because he is "the God of peace," his peace may well be called "the peace of God." The Holy Ghost, speaking of the Son of God under the name of the BRANCH, says of him, "he shall be a priest upon his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both," that is, between the Father and the Son. (Zech. 6:13.) In this passage we have a blessed intimation of a plan that was laid in eternity, whereby peace should be proclaimed to guilty man, whereby the weapons of war between God and his people should be laid aside, and peace should flow like a river over elect breasts. But again, our blessed Lord is himself "our peace, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; to make in himself of twain one new man, speaking peace." (Eph. 2:15.) Thus his sacred Person and finished work, his holy blood and obedience have become, as it were, the consecrated channel through which peace flows down into believing hearts. We were by nature "enemies and aliens, far from God by wicked works;" but he came as "the

prince of peace" to reconcile us unto God in his own body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; and thus came and preached peace to those which were afar off, and to them that were nigh." (Eph. 2:16, 17.) He made peace by silencing the thunders of a broken law; by poising the scales of offended justice, bringing his own obedience to adjust the balance; by harmonising all the attributes of Jehovah, which, without his intervention would have seemed, as far as our salvation was concerned, to be discordant. The ancient promise was that "he should stand and rule [margin] in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and this man," it adds, "shall be the peace when the Assyrian shall come into our land." (Mic. 4:4, 5.) But those blessings we cannot spiritually and experimentally know unless the Spirit of peace reveal them to our heart. Thus God the Father is the Author of peace, God the Son the Procurer of it, and God the Holy Ghost the Revealer of it; for he it is that seals upon the conscience that blood of sprinkling which speaks peace, and sheds abroad that love of God whereby it flows like a river.

2. But this peace of God is said to *pass all understanding*. It certainly passes all the understanding of the *natural* mind; for "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for those that love him;" and among these things is peace, the Lord's own legacy. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." "These things have I spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace." This peace from its very nature must pass all the understanding of the unregenerated heart; for how can the natural mind, which is full of unbelief, conceive what it is to have peace with God in believing; to be reconciled to a holy God by the blood of his dear Son; and to walk before him in the light of his countenance, as accepted in the Beloved? But

it passes even the understanding of the spiritual mind until made known to it by the power of God. And even then its height, its depth, its length, its breadth, pass all understanding, for its source, stream, and effects are all too hidden, too deep, and too wide to be comprehended by our present limited faculties. Look at its source in the eternal covenant; view the counsel of peace between the Father and the Son. Can human intellect comprehend it? Then view the stream. See the Son of God coming down from heaven to become man in the womb of the Virgin; view his sufferings in the garden and upon the cross. When you thus take a view by faith of the holy channel through which peace came, must you not say that it passes all understanding? And when we view the effects, may we not say of the blessed fruit of the peace of God, what the apostle says of the love of Christ, "It passeth knowledge?" So this peace of God in its source, stream, and effects passeth all understanding, both of the natural and of the spiritual mind.

3. But though it passeth all understanding, it does not pass by the soul; but *keeps the heart and the mind*. Both want keeping. Your heart wants keeping; for your heart—what is it? All spiritual affections centre there. "My son, give me thine heart," that is, thine affections. If there is no heart with God, there is no love for God. But this heart of ours is a sad wanderer: it is ever doing those two things which the Lord took so ill in the children of Israel, and bade the heavens be astonished at it, yea, be horribly afraid. "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." The heart, therefore, needs to be kept as with a mighty power, yea, by nothing short of the power of God itself. But nothing can keep the heart so well as the peace of God. For the peace of God holds it as in a silken leash, keeps it by the cross and by the sepulchre, links it on

to the throne above, and thus holding it firmly in its powerful yet soft grasp, keeps it from wandering after idols. But again, the heart is not only the seat of all the spiritual affections, but the very seat of faith itself; for "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." But faith cannot be maintained in living exercise except the heart be kept; for if the heart goes, faith goes with it; and the heart is only well and firmly kept by the peace of God ruling it and reigning in it. The heart is also the seat of hope, because it is with our heart we hope. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Hope thou in God." (Psalm 42:11.) "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." (Prov. 13:12.) Then hope in heart must make the heart well. In this sense, we may say that it is with the heart that we hope as well as believe and love. We cannot, then, either entertain or maintain a good hope through grace, unless the peace of God first enter and then keep the heart hoping to the end, for the grace that is to be brought at the revelation of Jesus Christ. But what a sure guardian, what a watchful sentinel is the peace of God! "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." (Prov. 4:23.) But the peace of God must keep watch over the heart and its issues, that the life of faith, hope, and love may freely flow through them to the fountain whence they originally cause.

4. But the *mind* is to be kept by the peace of God as well as the heart. The mind here means literally, according to the original, the thoughts, plans, counsels, schemes, and imaginations of the soul. All these need to be carefully watched over and vigilantly kept by that sacred and watchful guardian, Peace. Our *understanding* is to be kept from error, lest we drink down those deadly draughts which are so often presented to the lips of the unwary, and which are sure, if tasted, to mar all real peace. So acid is error, that a drop will curdle the pure milk of the word; for well may we say of all erroneous men, "Their drink is sour." (Hosea 4:18.) Our

thoughts and plans need to be kept from straying in forbidden pastures; for the carnal mind is ever after sin and sensual gratification. Our *judgment* needs also to be kept firm in God's truth, that "we be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, but may grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ." (Eph. 4:14, 15.) Our *plans and counsels* need also to be kept from ever scheming and plotting things for our own gratification, to feed pride and covetousness, ambition and worldly-mindedness, and be ever entangling themselves in a thousand projects to promote the worship of self.

But what can thus effectually keep heart and mind, as they should be kept in the holy fear of God, in the path of Christian obedience, in the resignation of our will to the will of Jehovah, in abstaining from things that God abhors, and walking in things that God approves? The peace of God which passeth all understanding. The law never kept a single soul in a way of obedience. It can curse, threaten, and terrify, and thus extort a feigned, unwilling obedience; but it never did produce Christian obedience. But what the law could not do, the peace of God which passeth all understanding can do, and do effectually; for it can make and keep the heart warm in the love of God and active and earnest in the patient obedience of Christ.

5. But observe, that all these rich blessings are only "*through Christ Jesus:*" for he is the channel, the divinely consecrated channel, through which every mercy comes. He is our peace now at God's right hand; he is ever offering before God the merits of his finished work here below, and thus by his ever-prevailing intercession, peace is proclaimed in the courts of heaven. And as thus proclaimed in heaven, it sounds also as with trumpet voice from the realms of bliss here below, for "Peace upon earth" was part of the angelic song sung at the

Saviour's birth in lowly Bethlehem. May we ever bear in mind, and above all things may we experimentally enjoy, the blessed truth that all peace is *in* Christ Jesus, all peace *by* Christ Jesus, and all peace *through* Christ Jesus.

Just let me, in conclusion, gather up the threads of my discourse, that I may present it to your eyes, before we part, as a connected whole.

Look at the *caution*, because it is graciously given us as a most needful and holy warning, "*Be careful for nothing*," in the sense I have explained it. But if you are burdened with every worldly care and your heart is gnawed with every carking anxiety, you will not be able to perform the all-comprehensive *precept* of letting your requests be made known unto God, for in looking to God with one eye you will be looking to yourself and the world with the other; and even upon your knees, the bill to be paid, the rent to be discharged, the cares of the family, the concerns of the household, will all rush in like a flood, and sweep away every vestige of prayer, just as the flood in Norfolk has swept away the banks that kept out the waters of the German ocean.* As long, then, as you are a prey to these carking cares, you will find it impossible to perform this all-comprehensive precept. But when faith enables you to lay aside these anxious cares, to trust in the providence of God, and wait upon him for his grace, then you will be able in a measure to act upon the precept, "In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." And then, and not till then, will you find the peace of God which passeth all understanding. You must get up the bank first to keep out the sea. If there be no bank, or if it be swept away, the German ocean will come in and cover your fertile acres with its slime and ooze. You must set up the bank; and here it is put up for you by the hand of an apostle, "Be

careful for nothing." Then prayer and supplication and thanksgiving will be duly rendered. And as your requests are made known to God, he who has given the promise will, in his own time and way, surely accomplish it. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will keep your heart and mind through Christ Jesus. And if once you get that peace of God into your bosom, it will not be like the German ocean, now rushing over thousands of cultivated acres and swamping them with sand and silt; but it will be like a river flowing into your bosom, and filling it with all joy and peace in believing.

* The sermon was preached at the time of the inundation in Norfolk.