



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

<http://www.puritansermons.com/>

Commentary on the Song of Songs, Chapter Two

PART I. -- CHRIST'S WORDS.

*Verse 1. I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.
2. As the lily among thorns so is my love among the daughters.*

This second chapter contains the same scope, and runs in the same strain with the former. It hath two principal parts: in the first, Christ speaks in the first two verses. In the second, the Bride continues, to the end.

Again, in these two verses, Christ doth first commend himself, verses 1,2. He describes his Bride, verse 2. That it is he who speaks, appears thus; 1. It is clear, at first looking upon the words, that he speaks in the second verse, and who else can be thought to speak in the first? He is the 'I' in the first verse, who claims the Bride by this possessive particle 'my' in the second. 2. The words, 'I am the rose of Sharon,' &c. are stately, becoming him alone to speak them: like these, 'I am the true vine,' 'I am the bread of life,' &c. And so majestic is the commendation, that it can agree to none other, but to him. 3. The Bride's work is to commend him, and not herself, especially with a commendation, beyond what he giveth her, verse 2, and therefore the first verse must be Christ's words, not hers.

The scope is, (for her instruction and comfort now in affliction,) that he may make her know himself: the very knowing of Christ is comfortable, and it is one of the most excellent, rare, and ravishing things he can show his Bride, to show her himself, or to make her know him: neither can he choose a subject more profitable in itself, or more welcome to her, to insist on, than to display his own beauty, whereby she may see her blessedness in such a match.

In the first verse then, Christ comes in commending himself, 'I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.' The rose is a sweet savouring flower, and so is the lily: Sharon and the valleys are added, because the roses and lilies that grew

there, were the best that were to be found. He is said to be that 'rose,' or 'the rose' and 'the lily,' as if there were no other, to distinguish him, as excellent and singular from all others. He thus sets forth himself to show, 1. That Christ Jesus hath a most lovely savour, and a most delightful and refreshful smell, to them that have spiritual senses to discern what is in him. 2. That there is nothing refreshful in creatures, but is more eminently and infinitely in him; therefore he is called the rose and the lily. 3. That whatever excellency is in Christ, is singularly and incomparably in him; there is no other rose, or lily but he; and what excellency is to be found in others, doth not deserve the name, being compared with him. 4. That he is never suitably commended, till he be lifted up above all. 5. That none can commend Christ to purpose but himself; he takes it therefore on him, 'I am,' &c. He can indeed commend himself effectually and none but he can do it. 6. That he manifests more of his loveliness to those who have gotten a begun sight and esteem of it: for, she had been commending it formerly, and now he discovers more of it to her. 7. That it is one of Christ's greatest favours to his Bride, and one of the special effects of his love, to set out himself as lovely to her, and to bear in his loveliness upon her heart; and this is the scope here.

In the second verse, he describes his Bride. Here we have these things to consider, 1. What she is; a 'lily.' 2. What others of the world beside are called here; the 'daughters' (so men without the church are to the church, and corrupt men in the church are to believers) that is, daughters of their mother the world; no kindly daughters to her, they are thorns. 3. The posture of Christ's Spouse, she is 'as a lily among thorns,' a strange posture and soil, for our Lord's love and lily to grow in.

The lily is pleasant, savoury, and harmless; thorns are worthless, unpleasant and hurtful. The lily's being compared with them, and placed amongst them, sets out both her excellency above them, and her sufferings from them. In general, *Observe*. 1. Christ draws his own beauty and the Bride's together, thereby to show their kindred and sibness (so to speak) she is not rightly taken up, but when she is looked upon as standing by him; and he not fully set forth, nor known without her. 2. He took two titles to himself, and he gives one of them to the Bride, the 'lily;' but with this difference, that he is 'the lily,' she 'as' or 'like the lily:' setting forth, 1. Wherein her beauty consists, it is in likeness to him. 2. From whom it comes, it is from him, her being his love, makes her like the lily. 3. The nearness of the mystical union, that is between Christ and his Bride; it is such, that thereby they some way share names, Jer. 23:6, and chap. 33:16. 4. He intermixes her beauty and crosses together, drawing them on one table, to give her a view of

both; and that for her humbling, and also for her comfort; it is not good for believers, to look only to the one without the other.

More particularly, *Observe*. 1. Christ's Bride is very lovely and beautiful. 2. The children of the world are natively hurtful to her. 3. In Christ's account the believer is exceedingly preferable to all others, of whatsoever place, or qualifications in the world. 4. Christ's relation and affection, doth not always keep off outward afflictions from his own Bride. 5. It is native to believers to have a crossed life in the world, their plantation here among thorns speaks it. 6. That the crosses are of more kinds than one, which believers are environed with, thorns grow on all hands beside Christ's lily. 7. Holiness and innocency will not always prevent wrongs and injuries from others, thorns will wrong even the lily. 8. Christ observes here, how she looks in her sufferings, and so he takes special notice, how his people carry in a suffering lot. 9. It is commendable to keep clean under sufferings, and to be lily-like, even amongst thorns.

PART II.--BRIDE'S WORDS.

Verse 3. As the apple .tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons: I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

The second part of the chapter may be subdivided in two; first, from the third verse, the Bride comes in, speaking as in a lively frame, to verse 8. 2. From that to the end, she speaks as being at some distance with the Bridegroom.

In the first part, 1. She commends Christ, and lays down this commendation, as the ground of her consolation, verse 3. 2. She proves it by her experience, *ibid*. 3. Explains the way of her coming to that experience, verse 4. 4. She cries out under the sense of it, verse 5. 5. She shows his tender care of her in that condition, verse 6. And lastly, expresseth her fear, lest there should be any change to the worse in her condition, and her care to prevent it, verse 7.

The dependence of the third verse upon the second, is clear: she takes the commendation out of Christ's mouth, which he gave her, and after that same manner almost turns it over on him, as she had done, chap. 1:16, and then

comforts herself in him: hath she crosses? Then he hath a shadow to hide her, and with this she settles herself, and doth not complain of her sufferings, Hence, *Observe*. 1. There is no staying of the heart against afflictions, but in Christ, 2. It is better for believers to insist in commending him, than describing their crosses.

Here there is, 1. The Bride's esteem of the children of the world, called here the 'sons,' they are like wild barren trees, that give no fruit, or comfort: the world is exceeding little worth, especially to those who know Christ. 2. Her esteem of Christ, he is like the 'apple-tree;' there is great odds betwixt Christ and all the world; there is ever fruit to be found on him, and a shadow in him. This is proven by her experience (for they who have felt and tasted how sweet he is, can speak somewhat to this) I encountered with many difficulties (says she) like scorplings of the sun: (see on chap 1 verse 5.) and could find no shelter, nor refreshment amongst the creatures: but I resolved to make use of Christ by faith, in reference to them (even as men do, by interposing a tree betwixt them and the heat, that they may have a shadow) and I found refreshing and ease, by the benefits and privileges that flow from Christ, and are purchased by him, and are enjoyed by virtue of an interest in him; which were very comfortable, even as sweet apples from an apple-tree, are refreshful to one sitting under its shadow in a great heat.

Observe. 1. Believers may be scorched with outward and inward heat; they may be exercised not only with sharp outward afflictions, but also with the sense of God's wrath, and with the fiery darts of Satan's temptations. 2. Christ is a complete shadow, and a cure for all. 3. They that would find Christ a shadow from the heat, must make use of him, and employ him for that end; they must 'sit down,' &c. 4. Believers never flee to his shadow till some heat scorch them; for, her being scorched with heat, is supposed here as that which made the shadow refreshful. 5. Faith in Christ, will compose believers in the midst of the greatest difficulties; it will set them down, &c. yea, and delight them also. 6. Much of the nature and exercise of faith, in its use-making of Christ, appears in its interposing of Christ betwixt us and wrath, or whatever may be troublesome to us, end in the quieting of ourselves upon that ground; for, this is it that is meant by sitting down under his shadow. 7. There are many choice and excellent fruits in Christ, that flow from him to believers. 8. All the spiritual benefits and privileges that believers enjoy, are Christ's fruits; they are his fruits by purchase and right, and by him communicated to believers. 9. Believers eat and feed, and may, with his blessed allowance do so upon what is his. 10. Christ's fruits are exceeding sweet, when they are eaten; they are satisfying, and, as it were, sensibly sweet. 11. These sweet fruits are neither eaten, nor the sweetness of them felt by believers, till they

go to Christ's shadow, and sit down delightfully under his righteousness; then they become refreshful.

Verse. 4. He brought me to the banqueting house: and his banner over me was love.

She proceeds in expressing her cheerful condition, by shewing the way of her access to it, verse 4, 'He brought me,' &c. Wherein, 1. She sets out the sweetness of the enjoyment of Christ's sensible love, by comparing it to a feast, or house of wine. 2. She tells who it was that brought her to it, 'he brought me.' 3. The manner how she was brought to it; it was by the out-letting of his love, 'his banner' (saith she) 'over me was love.' The first expression sets forth three things, 1. The great abundance of satisfying and refreshing blessings, that are to be found in Christ; such abundance of provision as useth to be laid up at a feast, or in a banqueting-house, 2. His liberal allowance thereof to his own, who for that end hath laid up this provision for them. 3. The nature of the entertainment; it is a feast of the best and most cordial things, a house of wine: the second is, 'He' that is Christ, 'brought me in.' It shews, 1. Believers' impotency to enter in there of themselves, and their want of right, that may give them access to the blessings that are laid up in Christ. 2. That it is Christ who makes their access; he purchased an entry by his death, he applies his purchase by his Spirit, and dispenseth it by his office, and so brings them in. 3. It suppones a freedom of grace in the bringing them in: they are brought in by his mere favour. 4. It contains a thankful remembrance, or acknowledgment of this deed of Christ's and an holding of this favour of him. The third holds forth the manner how she is brought in; it is under a 'banner of love:' a stately manner; it was love that brought her in: the expression implieth, that not only it was love that moved him to bring her in, but that he did it in a loving manner which amplifieth and heightens his love; She comes in marching, as it were in triumph, having love like a banner, or colours, adorning this march, and making way for her entry; so that even in the manner of her being brought in, the general predominant, visible thing (as it were) that appeared, was *love. Observe.* 1. Christ will sometimes bring his people into the sense of his love, exceeding lovingly and kindly, even as to the manner of engaging them. 2. Believers should observe his way with them. 3. This loving manner, in the way of his dealing with his people, doth exceedingly commend his love, and is an

heightening consideration of it. 4. Christ's love is in itself a most stately and triumphant thing. 5. It is only the love of Christ that secures believers in their battles and march, against their spiritual adversaries; and indeed they may fight, who have love for their colours and banners.

Verse 5. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples; for I am sick of love.

She is almost overcome with this banquet, and therefore cries out for help, verse 5. Here consider, 1. The case she is in, 2. The cure she calls for. 3. From whom she seeks it.

Her case is, that she is 'sick of love.' This is not to be taken for the fainting of a soul under absence, and the want of sense; all the context before and after, and the scope, will show it otherwise with her; but it is a sickness from the weight and pressure of felt inconceivable love, damishing her (as it were) and weakening her, she cannot abide that sight and fulness which she enjoys.

2. The cure she desires confirms this, 'stay me,' (saith she) or support me, for I am like to fall under it; and 'comfort me,' the word is strengthen me, or bed me, straw me with, or in apples, let me lie down amongst them. The first expression looks to the house of wine where she was, which suppones no want, and may be rendered, 'stay me in flagons,' as seeking support in this holy fill of the Spirit, whereby she was staggering. The second looks to the apple-tree, verse 3. And she would ever roll herself among the apples that come from this tree; and like the disciples, Matt. 17:4. saith (as it were) 'It is good to be here;' she would even be fixed and lie down in that posture, never to part with this happy condition again.

3. Those she speaks to, and from whom she seeks help, are expressed in the plural number (as is clear in the original) which shews a ravishment and kind of rapture in this exclamation; not observing to whom she speaks, but expressing her delight in that which she enjoyed, yet mainly intending Christ (as the disciples did, Matt. 17, not knowing what they said) for it is he who applies the cure in the next verse.

Observe. 1. Love will have a great out-letting at sometimes beyond others, as if a dam were gathered, and then letten out. 2. Sense of love in a high degree will straiten and weight a believer, as over-burdening and overpowering him, so

as he is put to say Hold, and 'wo's me;' as it is, Isa. 6:5: the nature of God's presence is such, and our infirmity so unsuitable thereto. 3. Love is lovely when the believer is almost dotting with it, and staggering under the weight and power of it. 4. It can cure even the same sickness it makes. These flagons and apples are the only remedy, though our bottles be now weak, and can hold but little of this new wine.

Verse 6. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.

She expresseth Christ's care of her in this condition, verse 6 as a most loving husband, he sustains her in his arms, in this swoon and swarf, which from joy she falls into, as the words do plainly bear. Observe. 1. Christ's love is a sensible. sustaining thing, and is able to support the heart undr its greatest weakness. 2. As Christ is tender of all his people, and at all times, so especially when they are in their fits of love-sickness. 3. As believers would observe Christ's love at all times, so especially when they are weakest; for then they will find it both seasonable and profitable so to do.

Verse 7. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love till he please.

This verse contains her care to entertain this condition, and the way she takes for that end. [That] they are the Bride's words, is, 1. Clear from the scope and matter. 2. From the expressions she useth, speaking of him, 'my love,' and 'till he please;' for, it becomes to give Christ his own liberty in staying, or going, and it were not for our good that our pleasure were the rule in our fellowship with him. Now in order to the securing of this comfortable condition to herself, first she adjures and charges, which is, 1. To show the concernment of the thing. 2. Her seriousness in it; for, she is in very great earnest. 3. A fear of misguiding this condition. 4. A difficulty so to prevent the hazard, as to keep all quiet.

2. The parties she speaks to, while she thus adjures, are the 'daughters of Jerusalem:' giving them the lesson she would take to herself, because they had need to be thus guarded. *Observe*. 1. That professors are in hazard to mar their own enjoyments, and to interrupt an intimate fellowship with Christ. 2. Beginners are readiest to fall into this sin. 3. Seriousness will stir up believers to be watchful over themselves, and will make them press others to be so also.

The expression, 'by the roes and hinds of the field,' is but added, for keeping the strain of this song (which is composed in an allegoric way, and every similitude is not to be narrowly searched into) and to show how tenderly they ought to watch, to prevent this hazard, as men having to do with 'roes and hinds of the field,' is but added, for keeping the strain of this song (which is composed in an allegoric way, and every similitude is not to be narrowly searched into) and to shew how tenderly they ought to watch, to prevent this hazard, as men having to do with roes, who are soon stirred; shewing that a little thing may stir up Christ, and mar the comfortable fellowship that is between him and his people.

3. The charge itself is, that 'they stir not up nor awake the beloved;' as a wife would say (when her husband is come home and resting in her arm) be quiet all, and let no din be in the house to awake him : and this charge reaches herself, as well as others; when she as the mother, commands all the little ones, or children (as it were) to be quiet, that Christ may not be stirred up, and made to remove; she ought to be much more careful in this herself. Hence, *Observe*. 1. If a sensible presence be not tenderly entertained, it will not last. 2. Believers should be most careful then, when they are admitted to near and sensible fellowship with Christ, that nothing may fall out which may provoke him to depart. 3. The least sinful motions and stirrings of corruption should be suppressed, as having a great tendency to provoke and stir up the beloved to be gone.

Lastly, This charge is qualified in these words, 'till he please.' Which does not imply, that she gives them leave at any time to stir him up ; but the meaning is, see that by your fault he be not awaked, till his own time come. *Observe* then, 1. Christ guides his visits and love-manifestations, by his sovereignty and pleasure. 2. He may withdraw from his people without respect to any particular provocation, as having sinful influence thereupon. 3. Christ's pleasure is believers' rule, in the things that are most precious to them: here she acquiesces, even to his withdrawing, when he shall please. 4. Believers may have peace, and be quiet under absence, if they have not sinfully provoked Christ to withdraw: for this is the thing the Bride aims at, as to herself, in this her care. 5. Often believers are guilty in marring Christ's fellowship with them before he please, and they might

enjoy Christ's company much longer oftentimes, if they did not sin him out of house and doors.

Verse 8. The voice of my beloved! Behold he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.

9. My beloved is like a roe, or a young hart: behold he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice.

These words contain a case of the Bride's, different from her case in the former words; there she was in Christ's arms; here she sees him afar off; there she was endeavouring to keep him still; here she is sensible that he is away, and verse ult. is praying for his return. Observe then from the connexion, the most satisfying and comfortable conditions of a believer, while upon earth, are not abiding; even the Bride must experience distance, as well as presence. 2. Sometimes sensible presence will not continue, even when believers are most careful to retain it, as we find she was in the words before.

Her distance hath two steps, 1. There are some views of Christ, and some intercourse with him, though afar off, in this chapter: then 2. She is deprived even of that, in the first part of the chapter following: and readily distance once begun, doth proceed from a lesser to a greater degree before it be removed.

More particularly, we would observe here, I. What is Christ's carriage, when the Bride doth not enjoy sensible presence in so lively a way: and that in two things, 1. What he is doing: he is coming, leaping, standing behind the wall, looking through the lattice, &c. 2. What he is saying; he is speaking to her, and, as it were, writing kind love-letters to her at that same time: Christ is both doing and speaking kindly to a believer, even when he is away to sense, if it be well discerned. II. We may see what is the Bride's carriage suitable to his, in four steps (worthy to be imitated by believers, for their own peace, in their disconsolate condition.) 1. She observes what he doth, though it be but a twilight discovery she hath of him. 2. She records what he saith, and reads his epistle often over. 3. She comforts herself in keeping the faith of her interest, and the hope of future enjoying of him, clear. And, 4. Prays in the mean time, for some manifestations of

his love, till that come. The first is, verses 8, and 9. The second, verses 10. to 16. The third, verses 16, and 17. The fourth in the close of the 17th verse, In her observation of Christ's way with her, verse 8. Consider, 1. His practice, which she observes. 2. Her observation of it. 3. How she is affected with it. And lastly, her expression of it.

The first of these is contained in these words, 'He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.' There are four things here to be taken notice of, 1. A supposed distance, for when he is said to be coming, he is not present: this distance is not in reality, as to the union that is betwixt Christ and a believer, that is always the same, but it is to be understood as the sense of his presence which may be interrupted. 2. It is said 'he cometh;' coming imports his drawing near to remove the distance, as being already on his way. Observe. 1. It is his coming that removes the distance between him and his people: the first motion of love is still on his side. And, 2. even when Christ is absent, if he were well seen, he is making way for our nearer union with him, and is upon his way coming again, John 14:3. Even when he is away he is still coming, though it may be afterward the distance seem to grow greater, and the night of absence darker. The third thing is, that there are mountains which he comes over, that is something standing between him and us, marring our access to him, and his familiarity with us, till he remove it, as mountains obstruct men's way in travel; and so difficulties in the way of God's work are compared to mountains, Zech. 4:7, 'Who art thou, O great mountain?' &c. So here, as there are difficulties to be removed, before the union betwixt Christ and us be made up; so also there are particular sins, as perjury, breach of covenant, and other clouds of guiltiness, which must be removed, ere his presence can be restored, after he goeth away. Again, coming over mountains, maketh one conspicuous and glorious afar off; so Christ's march and return to a believer is ever in triumph, over some great ground of distance, which makes him discernibly glorious. 4. Christ is said to be leaping and skipping which imports, 1. An agility in him, and a facility to overcome whatever is in the way. 2. A cheerfulness and heartiness in doing of it; he comes with delight over the highest hill that is in his way, when he returns to his people. 3. It holds forth speediness: Christ comes quickly, and he is never behind his time, he cannot mistrust a believer; his term-day is their necessity, and be sure he will meet with them then. 4. It imports a beauty, majesty and stateliness in his coming, as one in triumph; and so he comes triumphantly and in great state; and what is more stately than Christ's triumphing over principalities and powers, and making a shew of them openly, by over-coming the difficulties in his way to his Bride.

The second thing in the verse, is her observation of this; Christ in his way is very discernible to any that is watchful, and believers should observe his way when absent, as well as present. If it be asked how she discerned it? there is no question, faith is here taking up Christ according to his promise, John 14:3, 'If I go away, I will come again;' and faith lays hold on this: faith is a good friend in desertion, for as we may here see, it speaks good of Christ even behind his back: when sense would say, he will return no more, faith says he is coming, and prophesies good of Christ, as there is good reason.

The third thing is, how she is affected with it; this observation proves very comfortable to her, as her abrupt and cutted expression imports, 'the voice of my beloved:' as also the 'behold,' she puts to it, which shows, 1. That her heart was much affected with it. 2. That she thought much of it. 3. That it was someway wonderful that Christ was coming, even over all these difficulties to her; there is no such ravishing wonder to a sensible believing sinner, as this, that Christ will pass by all his sins, yea take them all on himself, and come over all difficulties unto him, therefore is this, behold, added here.

The fourth thing is her expression of this, which confirms the former, and it is such as sets out a heart, as it were, surprised, and overcome with the sight of a coming friend. Hence, *Observe*. 1. A sinner's thoughts of a coming Christ, will be deeply affecting; and these thoughts of him are misshapen and of no worth, that do not in some measure cast fire into, and inflame the affections. And, 1. A heart suitably affected with the power of Christ's wonderful grace and love will be expressing somewhat of it to others, as the Bride is doing here.

In the 9th verse the observation of his carriage is continued: where, 1. He is commended. 2. His carriage is described, with her observation of it. The commendation she gives him is, 'He is like a roe, or a young hart:' these creatures are famous, for loving and kindly carriage to their mates, as also for loveliness and pleasantness in themselves, Pro. 5:19. Thus he is kindly and loving: O so kind as Christ is to his church and chosen! Jonathan's love to David passed the love of women, but this surpasseth that, beyond all degrees of comparison. 2. He is timeous and seasonable, in fulfilling his purposes of love to his Bride; no roe or hart for swiftness is like him in this and this may be the ground, from which she concludeth that he was coming and leaping in the former words, because Christ's affections, and way of manifesting them, is such as this:

2. His carriage is set forth in three steps, held forth in allegoric expressions. The first is, 'he stands behind our wall,' that is as a loving husband may withdraw from the sight of his spouse for a time, and yet not be far away, but

behind a wall, and there standing to see what will be her carriage, and to be ready to return; or as nurses will do with their little children, to make them seek after them; so says she, though Christ now be out of sight, yet he is not far off, but, as it were, behind the wall; and it is called 'our' wall, in reference to some other she speaks with, of him; and a wall, because often we build up these separations ourselves, betwixt him and us (Isa. 56:1.) that hides Christ, as a wall hides one man from another; yet even then Christ goes not away, but waits to be gracious, as weary with forbearing: there is much love on Christ's side, in saddest desertions, and our hand is often deep in his withdrawings: it is sad when the wall that hides him, is of our building: there is often nothing betwixt him and us, but our own sin.

The second step is, 'he looketh forth at the window,' which is to the same purpose. The meaning is, though I get not a full sight of him, yet he opens, as it were a window, and looks out, and I get some little glance of his face: sometimes Christ will neither (as it were) let the believer in to him, nor will he come out to them; yet he will make windows, as it were, in the wall and give blinks of himself unto them.

The third step is, 'he shows himself through the lattice:' that is, as there are some windows that have tirlesses, or lattices on them, by which men will see clearly, and yet be but in a little measure seen; so, says she, Christ is beholding us, though we cannot take him up fully: yet the smallest bore whereby Christ manifests himself, is much and to be acknowledged. All this she observes with a 'behold,' as discerning something wonderful in all these steps: Christ hath several ways of communicating his love to his people (and that also even under desertions and withdrawings) and there are several degrees of these, yet the least of them is wonderful, and should be welcomed by believers, if it were to see him but through the lattice.

Verse 10. My beloved spake, and said unto me, rise up my love, my fair one, and come away.

11. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;

12. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;

13. The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vine with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise my love, my fair one, and come away.

Having put by her observation of his carriage, she comes to speak to the second part, namely, what was her carriage: and it was to read over, or think over with herself, or to tell over to others, what Christ had said unto her: this is a main piece of spiritual wisdom, to fill Christ's room in his absence with his word and call, and to read his mind only from these, the best interpreters of it. These words prefaced to Christ's epistle, or sermon, 'my beloved spake, and said unto me,' are not idly set down, before she tell, what the words which he spake were, But, 1. It shews she delights in repeating his name, for she had made mention of it before, verse 8. 2. It shows what commended Christ's epistle, or words to her, it was not only the matter therein contained (though that was warm and sweet) but it is come (saith she) from my beloved, it was he that said this, it was he that sent me this word. 3. It shews her discerning of his voice; and her assurance, that the word, call, and promise, (she was refreshing herself with) was his word, and no devised fable. It is a notable ground of consolation in Christ's absence to believers, when they are clear, that such and such gracious words come out of Christ's own mouth to them. 4. It says, that fellowship with Christ, is no dumb exercise; those that are admitted to fellowship with him, he will be speaking with, otherwise than with the world. And, 5. That a believer hath an ear to hear, not only what the minister saith, but also what Christ saith. 6. It is the word as from Christ's own mouth, that hath an effectual impression; and a believer will receive it as such, that it may leave such an impression upon his heart. 7. When Christ quickens a word, it will be sweet; and such a word will be retained, so that those who have been quickened by it, will be able long afterwards to repeat it is our getting little good of the word of the Lord, that makes us retain it so ill. 8. It affords much satisfaction to a believer, when he can say, Christ said this or that to

me, and that it is no delusion. 9. What Christ says unto the spirits of his own, in communion with them, may bide the light, and is, on the matter, that same which he says in the word and gospel, as we will see in the following discourse, which for this end, and for the edification of others, and honour of the beloved, she tells over.

We may take these words or epistles of Christ's, as directed to three sorts (as the duty here pressed, 'rise and come away,' will bear,) 1. To those that are dead in sins, whom Christ by his voice quickens, and makes to rise, John 5:28. Although this be not the immediate intent of it, as it is spoken to a believer; yet considering the scope of recording this, and the matter contained in it, it may well be thought useful to engage those who are yet strangers to Christ, there being still but the same way of making at the first, and afterward recovering nearness with him, to wit, by faith in him; and so it will press receiving of, and closing with Christ. 2. We may consider it as spoken to believers, but to such as sleep, or are sitten up; so it presseth quickening. And, 3. As spoken to believers in a disconsolate, discouraged condition; so its scope is to stir, quicken, rouse and comfort Christ's Bride, in any of these two last cases, that he may bring her into more nearness of fellowship with himself and to more boldness in the use-making of him; which is the great scope he aims at.

There are three parts of this sermon, or epistle, 1. There is a kindly invitation, that mainly respects the pressing of faith, from verse 10, to 14. 2. There is a loving direction, or two, verse 14, looking especially to the practice of duties. 3. Lest any thing should be wanting, he gives a direction concerning the troublers of her peace, verse 15.

In all these parts, there are four things common to be found in each of them. 1. Some sadness in her condition supposed. 2. Some directions given to cure it. 3. Some motives used, to press the practice of these directions. 4. Some repetitions, to show his seriousness in all, and the concernment of the thing spoken.

The case wherein those who are here spoken to, are supposed to be, in this first part of Christ's sermon, verse 10, &c. is, 1. Deadness, total, or partial: believers may be under a decay, and be in part dead. 2. It is supposed that they are secure, and not vigorous; but insensible, in a great part, of that ill. 3. That they are disconsolate, and heartless under distance and deadness: which ills often meet together.

The direction he gives in order to the helping of this, is in two words, 1. 'Rise.' 2. 'Come away.' Which says, that as she was now in a case of strangeness to

Christ, so there was a necessity of rousing herself, and coming out of it; such a necessity as there is for a straying wife to return to her husband. Now these words are a sweet call of a kind husband, inviting to this return, and showing the remedy of straying, and estrangement from him. 'Rising' imports, 1. One that is settled some way, in a condition opposite to walking and running. 2. A stirring up of themselves as unsatisfied therewith, and desirous to be out of it, with some endeavour to be up again: declining from Christ puts souls still down, and holds them at under. 1. 'Come away,' holds forth a term from which she is to come, from that condition she was in, whatever it was, it was not good: men are in no desirable condition, when Christ calls them. 2. A term to which she is to come, and that is Christ; it is to follow the Bridegroom; to get her brought to a nearer union and communion with him, is the great thing he aims at. 3. An act whereby she passeth from what she was, and turning her back on that, moves towards him, that she may thereby attain nearer union and fellowship with him. By both which, we conceive the exercise of faith in him, is mainly holden forth, 1. Because faith is ordinarily in scripture set forth by coming, Isa. 55:1; John 5:40; John 6:35, and this expression suits well the act of faith. 2. Because it is the only means of making up the distance betwixt him and us: decay in the exercise of faith, and distance from Christ, go together; and the exercise of faith, and nearness with him, are also inseparable companions. This is the meaning then, why liest thou in this discouraged, decayed and comfortless condition? There is another, and a far better, to wit, a lively and comfortable condition allowed upon thee; Christ calls thee to exercise faith in him, for recovering of thy case. And this now is set down imperatively by way of command, that we may know that believing in Christ, or keeping communion with him by faith, are not left to our option, but are laid on by a peremptory command, for necessitating us to the exercise of it, 1 John 3:23, as a thing most acceptable to him, with which he cannot be angry, nor will he call obedience thereunto presumption.

3. When he hath given the invitation; he presseth it most seriously and weightily; for though it be our concernment, we are not easily induced even to believe: O but the world is much mistaken in this, that think it an easy matter to believe! And also he would have us knowing; he allows us the comfortable exercise of faith in him, with all his heart (if we may speak so) when he thus presseth and persuadeth us to it; likewise we may gather, that it is no common thing which he exhorts unto, when he doth so seriously press it, but it is of most weighty concernment to us.

There are three ways he maketh use of, to press it: 1. By excellent, loving titles, 'my love,' and 'fair one;' which are given here, especially to let her know he

loved her, and thereby to encourage her to follow the call. The faith of his love, hath no little influence upon our acting faith in particulars on him. 2. To show that he is no rigid, nor severe censurer of a discouraged believer, no, 'my fair one' (saith he) even when she hath many spots; Christ will raise no ill report on his own, whatever be their failings. 3. He presseth it from the special relation he hath to her, 'my love,' and 'my fair one,' which makes all his words very kindly, and shows an obligation on her, by the covenant-relation that stood between them to be his, and to subject herself to his directions, according to that word, Psalm 45:10, 'Hearken O Daughter,' &c. 'Forget thy father's house,' &c. And therefore she ought to leave all and cleave to him: Christ requires nothing from us, but according to the covenant, that ties us to communion or cohabitation (to speak so) with Christ, and it is a most binding obligation; if this prevail not in pressing us to duty, that we are Christ's, nothing will prevail: it is no little practick in believers, to be like the relation they stand in to Christ; what, my love (saith he) becomes it you to be so strange? 'Rise and come,' &c. Some other thing is allowed to you than to others, and some other thing is called for from you, than is to be found in the way of others.

The third way he insisteth to urge this (for the call, and kindness come still on his side, even when we are in the fault) is by most pressing arguments of three sorts. The first is verse 11. 'Rise' (saith he) 'and come away,' for there is no hazard now to travel this journey, because what may scare you is done away. The winter cold and storm is past, and the rain that makes rivers impassable and journeys dangerous and wearisome (therefore, it is said Matt. 24:20, 'pray that your flight be not in the winter') these are over. This suppones, 1. There was a sharp winter, and a bitter rain (as it were) whereby the way of fellowship with God, was impassable, till these were removed; the sword (as it were) standing to keep sinners from paradise, that is, the sentence and curse of the broken law, and the wrath of God pursuing therefor; Which was indeed a fearful winter, and storm that made the sun dark, and the day gloomy, therefore is God's wrath in scripture compared to 'terrible blasts and tempests,' and 'who can stand before his cold?' Psalm 147:17. 2. It says, that now these are done away by Christ; and by his call in the gospel, he assures his people, they shall find them fully removed, so that there is no wrath nor curse, that any who yields to it needs to fear. 3. It implies that the gospel brings good news, and there is none better than this, that God's justice is satisfied, and his wrath removed. 4. It imports, that Christ can bear sure testimony to this, that wrath is over, because he paid a price to remove it, and therefore sinners may take his word, and follow his call. And, 5. That believers are sometimes ready to suspect, more than they have ground, that there is some storm yet before them; but Christ hath made all fair weather, ere he call: O great

argument! He calls not to fight, but to gather the spoil. He puts not believers to the sea, till he himself hath made all calm: believers meet with blasts and storms sometimes, but readily that is when their back is on Christ, and not when their faces are to him-ward: the wind of wrath is not in a sinner's face that seeketh Jesus, but the word saith to such 'fear not,' Mark 16:6, 'ye seek him.'

2. He presseth her to rise and come, from some heart-some encouragement he propones, verse 12. There is a great change (saith he) now, when the angry winter is over, all things are pleasant and lovely. 1. 'The flowers appear,' that shows there is heat and warmth in the earth, and it is an effect of the spring, and a proof that winter is past. Hereby the fruits of grace, appearing in the change that is wrought upon sinners, may be signified, as is frequently hinted in this Song, where the church is called a garden, and believers are the flowers: come, (saith he) grace hath made others to come through the ground, who once were like flowers in the winter, under ground, but now they appear and flourish. 2. 'The time of the singing of birds is come.' As in the spring, birds sing, which in the winter drooped: so (saith he) now many poor sinners have changed their sad note, and begin to sing, who once were sinking under fears; and the good news of the gospel, like the voice of the turtle, is heard in our land;' these good tidings have been sent even to us, which is no little evidence of love, and no small confirmation to faith. That the news of the gospel, and the consolation of sinners thereby, is here understood, is very agreeable to the scope: and these prove the removing of wrath, and are encouraging for stirring sinners up to the exercise of faith. And O how how heartsome, and refreshful is the spiritual spring, when the 'day-spring from on high' visits us! (as these things mentioned in the text, are in the natural spring very pleasant, and tend to provoke men to go and recreate themselves in the fields.) And this is the particular scope of this place: there is never a sinner hath gotten good of Christ, but it proves him to be very kind; and the blessed change Christ hath wrought on them, should encourage others to believe, especially when it is the day of their visitation, and the Sun of righteousness hath become warm by the gospel unto them, or unto the place and society in which they live. 3. He presseth his direction and call, by the very presentness and now, of the season of grace, verse 13, 'The fig-tree putteth forth,' &c. Which shows not only, that summer is near, but that 'it is even at the door,' Matt. 24:32,33. And (saith he) the vines bud and give a smell; whereby is holden forth, the thriving of the plants of God's vineyard, under the dispensation of grace, as we may see verse 15. All these prove that 'now is the acceptable time, and now is the day of salvation;' and there are large allowances of consolation to them that now will accept of Christ's offers, and be subject to his call: therefore, saith he, even to us, sit not the time when all is ready, but up, and come away: and that 'the

voice of the turtle is heard in our land,' (that is even the church wherein we live) proves it to be the season of grace also; for, it is long since the time of the turtles' singing hath come to us, and their voice is yet still heard:' and this says the season of grace is amongst our hands, now when Christ's call comes to our door, and therefore it should not be neglected.

And so he doth in the fourth place, repeat the call in the end of verse 13, 'Arise my love,' &c. And this repetition is to shew, 1. His willingness to have it effectual, if sinners were as willing, it would soon be a bargain. 2. Our sluggishness in not answering at once, therefore must word be upon word, call upon call, line upon line, precept upon precept. 3. To bear out the riches of his grace and love in this call, wherein nothing is wanting that can be alleged to persuade a sinner to close with Christ, and to press one that hath closed with him to be cheerful in him: what a heartsome life might sinners have with Christ, if they would embrace him, and dwell with him in the exercise of faith! they should have always a spring-time, and possess (to say so) the sunny side of the brae of all the world beside, walking in gardens and orchards, where the trees of the promises are ever fruitful, pleasant, and savoury to sight, smell, taste; and every word of Christ, as the singing of birds, heart-some and delightful to the ear; and all of them healthful to the believer. Who will have a heart to sit Christ's call? Or if they do, who will be able to answer it, when he shall reckon with them? It will leave all the bearers of the gospel utterly inexcusable. Lastly, this repetition shews the importunateness, and the peremptoriness of his call; he will have no refusal, neither will he leave it arbitrary, if we will come, when we will come, or what way: but he straitly enjoineth it, and that just now: it is always time to believe, when Christ calls, and it is never time to shift, when he persuades. All this says, Christ must be a kind and loving Husband; how greatly play they the fool, that reject him! and how happy are they who are effectually called to the marriage of the Lamb!

Verse 14. O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs: let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.

This 14th verse, contains the second part of Christ's sweet and comfortable sermon; wherein, besides the title which he gives his Bride, there are three things, 1. Her case. 2. The directions which he propones, as the cure of her case. 3. The motive pressing it.

The title is, 'my dove:' this hath a sweet insinuation and motive in it. Believers are styled so, 1. For their innocent nature, Matt. 10:16. 2. For their tenderness, and trembling at the word of the Lord, Hos. 11:11; Isa. 38:14. Hezekiah mourned as a dove. 3. For their beauty and purity, Psalm 68:13. 4. For their chaste adhering to their own mate, in which respect, that of Isa. 38:14, is thought to allude to the mourning of the one, after the other's death: This shews what a believer should be, and who deserves this name.

The condition of this dove is, that she is 'in the clefts of the rock, and in the secret places of the stairs:' it is ordinary for doves to hide themselves in the rocks, or holes in walls of houses; and this similitude is used sometimes in a good sense, as Isa. 60:8, sometimes in an ill sense, as pointing out infirmity, and too much fear and silliness, Hos. 7:11, Ephraim is a silly dove without heart, that goes to Egypt, &c. The Bride is here compared to a dove hiding itself, in the last sense, out of unbelief and anxiety, taking her to poor shifts for ease, and slighting Christ, as frightened doves that mistake their own windows, and fly to other hiding-places; the scope being to comfort and encourage her, and the directions calling her to holy boldness, and prayer to him (implying that these had been neglected formerly) doth confirm this. Then says the Lord, my poor heartless dove, why art thou discouraged, taking thee to holes (as it were) to hide thee, fostering misbelief and fainting? that is not the right way.

What then should she do (might it be said) seeing she is so unmeet to converse with him, or look out to the view of any that looks on? He gives two directions, holding forth what was more proper, and fit for her case, 1. Let me see thy countenance (saith he). Like one that is ashamed, thou hidest thyself as if thou durst not appear before me, but come (saith he) let me see thy countenance. This expression imports friendliness, familiarity, and boldness in her coming before him: so this phrase of seeing one's face is taken, Gen. 43:3,5, and 2 Sam. 14:32, as

the not shewing of the countenance, supposeth discontent or fear; so then the Lord calls by this to holy familiarity with him, and confidence in it, in opposition to her former fainting and misbelief. The second direction is, let me hear thy voice. To make him hear the voice, is to pray, Psalm 5:3, and under it generally all the duties of religion are after comprehended: it is like, discouragement scared the heartless Bride from prayer, and she durst not come before him; do not (saith he) but call confidently upon me in the day of trouble, and time of need.

Observe. 1. Prayer never angers Christ (be the believer's case what it will) but forbearing of it will. 2. Discouragement when it seizes on the child of God, is not soon shaken off; and therefore he not only gives one direction upon another, but also adds encouragements and motives suitable to these directions.

And so we come to the third thing in the verse, the motives he makes use of to press his directions, which are two, 1. 'Sweet is thy voice.' 2. 'Thy countenance is comely.' What is my voice and countenance, might she say (for proud unbelief is exceeding humble, and subtile, when it is opposing, and quarreling with Christ's call) yea, (saith he) thy voice is sweet; there is no music in the world so pleasant to me, as the prayer of a poor believer. Now this doth not so much commend our prayers, as it shews his acceptation of them, and the excellency of his golden censer, that makes them with his odours so savoury before God, Rev. 8:3. And, 2, (saith he) thy countenance though there be spots on it, yet to me it is comely, therefore let me hear thy voice, let me see thy countenance. Christ had rather converse with a poor believer, than with the most gallant, stately person in all the world. Besides, *Observe.* 1. Fainting may overmaster even a poor believer, and misbelief may mire him. 2. There are often foolish feckless shifts made use of by believers, for defending misbelief and discouragement, when they are under temptation. 3. Faithless fears, and discouragement may come to that height, as to scare believers from Christ's company, and mar them in prayer to him. 4. Misbelief bears out still this to a tempted soul that Christ cares not for it; yea, that he disdains such a person and his company. 5. Christ is tender of fainting believers, and of their consolation, even when they suspect him most, and when their suspicions are most unreasonable and uncharitable to him, Isa. 49:14,15. 6. Christ allows poor believers a familiar and confident walk with him; they might all be courtiers, for the access that is allowed them, if they did not refuse their allowance, and sinfully obstruct their own access thereto. 7. Christ loves to be much employed by his people, and there is nothing more pleasing to him, than frequently to hear their voice. 8. He is a sweet and gentle constructor of them, and their service; and is not rigid, even when often they have many misconstructions of him. 9. The more

discouragement seizeth upon the soul, there should be the more prayer, and thronging in upon Christ; for there is no outgate to be expected, but in that way. 10. None needs to fear to put Christ on their secrets; or they need not so to fear (if they be sincere) that they spill their prayers, as thereby to be kept from prayer, or made heartless in it; for it is Christ that hears them, whose censer, Rev. 8:6, makes them savoury before God: 'let me hear thy voice,' is no little encouragement in that duty: and the right consideration of it, would help to much boldness in prayer; and especially considering, that the God who is the hearer of prayer, is our Beloved.

Verse 15. Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.

This 15th verse contains the last part of Christ's sermon; wherein, as he had formerly given directions in reference to her particular walk, so here he evidenceth his care of her external peace: that Christ speaks these words, the continuation and series of them with the former, the scope (which is to make full proof of his care) and the manner how the duty here mentioned is laid on, to wit, by way of authority, makes it clear. There are three things in them, 1. An external evil incident to the church, and that is, to be spoiled by foxes. 2. A cure given in a direction; 'take them,' &c. 3. He gives reasons to deter all from cruel pity in sparing of them, 'for,' &c.

In clearing the case here supposed, as incident to the church, we are to consider, 1. What these vines are. 2. What be these foxes. 3. How they spoil the vines. For clearing the first, consider, that the visible church is often compared in scripture to a vineyard, Matt. 21:33. And the particular professors, especially believers, are as the vine trees that grow in it; so, Isa. 5:7, 'the vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel,' collectively, 'and the men of Judah are his pleasant plants.' They are called so, 1. For their fecklessness in themselves, Ezek. 15:2,3, &c. yet excelling in fruit beyond others. 2. Because of God's separating them from others, and taking pains on them above all others, Isa: 27:2,3, for these and other reasons, they are called vines. Next, by foxes are understood false teachers Ezek. 13:4. 'O Israel; thy prophets' (that is, thy flattering teachers, as the context clears) 'are as foxes in the deserts.' And, (Matt. 7:15,) they are called 'wolves in sheep's clothing:' hereby are meant, not all those who in something differ in their own judgment from the received rule, if they vent it not for corrupting of others, or the disturbing of the church's peace; but those who are, in respect of others, seducers,

teaching men to do as they do, in that which tends to the church's hurt; and such also, as by flattery and unfaithfulness, destroy souls, proportionally come in to share of the name, as they do of the thing signified thereby, as that place of Ezekiel, before cited, and chap. 34:2,3, doth confirm.

Now they get this name for their resembling foxes, in three things, 1. In their abominable nature; wherefore they are called, foxes, wolves, dogs, &c. and such like, which are abhorred and hated of all men; and so are these most hateful to God, and so ought they to be with all others. 2. For their destroying, hurtful nature, in their destroying of the church; therefore called 'ravens wolves,' Matt. 7:15; and 'grievous wolves,' Acts 20:29; 'who subvert whole houses,' Tit. 1:11; 'and whose word eateth as doth a grangrene,' 2 Tim. 2:17. 3. They are compared to these for their subtilty, a fox being famous for that, for which cause Herod is called a fox, Luke 13:32. So false teachers speak lies in hypocrisy, 1 Tim. 4:2; creep into houses, their doctrines eat as a canker insensibly: and they are, 2 Cor. 11:13,14, called 'deceitful workers:' and as their master Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, so do they themselves into the ministers of Christ: all such beasts whatever their shape be, are hateful to Christ and his church. 3. These false teachers or foxes, are said to 'spoil the vines,' for foxes hurt not a vineyard, or a flock of lambs more than false teachers do the church. 1. Corrupting the purity of doctrine. 2. Obscuring the simplicity of worship. 3. Overturning the beauty of order and bringing in confusion. 4. Spoiling her bond of unity, and rending the affections, and dividing the ways of her members, thereby dissipating the flock. 5. Extinguishing the vigour and life of christian practice; diverting from what is more necessary, to hurtful and vain janglings, which do still increase to more ungodliness, and have never profited them who are occupied therein, Heb. 13:7. 6. By ruining souls, carrying them headlong to the pit, 2 Pet. 2:1, and 3:16. There is no hurt nor hazard the church of Christ meets with, or ever met with, more grievous and dangerous, than what she meets with from such, although this be an exercise and trial, ordinarily incident to her.

2. The cure the Lord provides, is, the furnishing of his church with discipline, and the giving of directions for managing of it in these words, 'Take us,' &c. wherein consider these four, 1. To whom it is directed. 2. What is required. 3. A motive insinuated in the expression, 'take us.' 4. The extent of the direction, for the obviating of a question. It may be supposed to be directed to one of four. 1. Either to the Bride; or, 2. To angels; or, 3. To magistrates; or, 4. To church guides. Now it is to none of the first three, therefore it must be to the last and fourth: first, It is not to the Bride: for, 1. The word 'take' in the original, is in the plural number, and signifieth take ye: now the Lord useth not to speak to the

church, but as to one. 2. He says, 'take us,' and so taking the Bride in with himself, as a party for whom this service is to be performed, the speech must be directed to some third. 2. It is not directed to angels, these are not spoken to in all this Song, and this being a duty to be performed while the church is militant, they come not in to gather the tares from the wheat, till the end of the world, nor to separate the bad fish from the good, till the net be fairly on the shore. 3. This direction cannot be given to the magistrate; for, besides that he is not mentioned in this Song, nor as such, hath he any part in the ministry of the gospel, or is capable to be thus spoken unto (although the duty from the force of its argument will also reach him in his station, because he should, so far as he can, prevent the spoiling of Christ's vineyard in his place) besides this, I say, this direction must take place in all times, whenever the church hath such a trial to wrestle with, otherwise it were not suitable to Christ's scope, nor commensurable with her need: now for many hundreds of years the church wanted magistrates to put this direction in practice, yet wanted she not foxes, nor was she without a suitable capacity of guarding herself against them, by that power wherewith Christ hath furnished her. It remains therefore, 4. That it must be spoken to Christ's ministers, and officers in the church, called rulers in the scripture, and in this Song, watchmen and keepers of this vineyard, as by office, contradistinguished from professors, chap. 3:3, and 5:7, and 8:11,12. Such the church never wanted, such are required to watch, (Acts 20:24.) against wolves, and such in the church of Ephesus are commended, (Rev. 2:3,4,) for putting this direction in execution. 2. The duty here required is to take them, as men use to hunt foxes till they be taken: and this implies all that is needful for preventing their hurting of Christ's vines: Christ's ministers are to lay out themselves in discovering, confuting and convincing, censuring and rejecting them, Tit. 3:11. That is, not to endure them that are evil, but to try them judicially, as it is, Rev. 2:2.

Observe. 1. Christ's church is furnished with sufficient authority in herself, for her own edification, and for censuring of such as would obstruct the same. 2. This church authority is not given to professors in common, or to the Bride as the first subject, but to their guides, Christ's ministers and servants. 3. It is no less a duty, nor is it less necessary to put forth this power against false teachers, than against other gross offenders: so did Paul, 2 Tim. 1:*ult.* and so commands he others to do, Tit. 3:10, heresy and corrupt doctrine being also a fruit of the flesh; Gal. 5:20, as well as other scandalous sins.

3. There is a motive to press this, implied, while he saith, 'take us;' which words insinuate, that it is service both to him and her, and that ministers are his servants, and the church's for Christ's sake. It shows also his sympathy, in putting

himself (as it were) in hazard with her (at least mystically considered) and his love in comforting her, that he thinks himself concerned in the restraint of these foxes, as well as she is.

4. The direction is amplified to remove an objection. Say some, all heresies, or all heretics are not equal, some comparatively are little to be regarded, and it is cruelty to meddle with these, that seem to profess fair. No (saith he) take them all, even the the 'little foxes;' for, though they be but little, yet they are foxes, though they be not of the grossest kind (as all scandals in fact are not alike, yet none is to be dispensed with) so they are (saith he) foxes, and corrupt others; for, a little leaven will leaven the whole lump (often small-like schisms, or heresies, such as the Novatians and Donatists, &c. have been exceedingly defacing to the beauty of the church) therefore, (saith he) hunt and take them all. How small a friend is our Lord to toleration? And how displeased is he with many errors, that the world thinks little of? Magistrates, ministers and people may learn here, what distance ought to be kept with the spreaders of the least errors, and how every one ought to concur in their stations, for preventing the hurt that comes by them.

The last thing in the verse, is the reasons wherewith this direction is backed and pressed: The first is, all of them 'spoil the vines:' error never runs loose, and heretics never get liberty, but the spoiling of the vines one way or other follows; and can beasts be suffered in a garden, or orchard, and the plants not be hurt?

2. If any say, they are but little foxes, and unable to hurt. He answers this, and adds a second reason, in saying 'the grapes are tender;' or, 'the vines are in the first grapes' that is as they (while scarce budding or sprouting) are easily blasted by a small wind, so the work of grace in a believer, or Christ's ordinances in his church, are most precious and tender wares, and cannot abide rough hands; even the least of seducers, or corrupt teachers, may easily wrong them; they are of such a nature, as they may soon be spoiled, if they be not tenderly and carefully looked to.

Observe. 1. They that have grace should be tender of it; it may easily be hurt. 2. Gracious persons, should not think themselves without the reach of hazard from corrupt teachers; for, this is spoken of the Bride, 'the foxes spoil the vines.' 3. Our Lord Jesus is exceedingly tender of the work of grace, in and amongst his people, and where it is weakest, he is some way most tender of it. 4. This argument here made use of, says also, that those who are most tender of his church, and the graces of his people, will be most zealous against false teachers even the least of them; for these two are joined together in him, and are in

themselves necessary to preserve the one, and restrain the other; and the suffering of these to ramble and run without a check, cannot be the way of building, but of spoiling Christ's church.

The third motive, or reason pressing the watchmen to have a care of the vines, is hinted in the possessive particle, 'our,' 'for our vines,' &c. which is relative to the watchmen, whom he takes in with himself, as having a common interest in the church; the church is his, and theirs, as the flock is the owner's, and the shepherd's, who are particularly set to have the oversight of it; for, the shepherd may say, this is my flock, which no other servant can say: and this is a great piece of dignity put upon ministers, to be 'fellow workers with Christ,' 2 Cor. 6:1, &c. and binds on their duty strongly; for, saith Christ here to them, ye will have loss also, if ye see not to it, because ye must account for the vineyard, wherewith ye are intrusted; It is yours, and yet ye are not absolute lords, for it is also mine, I am the owner of it; and so the vines are both theirs and Christ's, their interest speaks how naturally they should care for them; his interest shews the dependency both ministers and people ought to have on him.

Verse 16. My beloved is mine, and I am his; he feedeth among the lilies.

17. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bethel.

Now follows the two last parts of her carriage in the Beloved's absence; first after she hath (as it were) read over this epistle, she comforts herself in his love, and her interest in him though he be absent. (It is a good use of his word, when it is made use of, for strengthening our faith in him, when sense is away). There are two parts of this consolation, 1. Her faith is clear for the present, verse 16. 2. Her hope is solid in the expectation of an excellent day coming, verse 17. Next, verse 17. she puts up a prayer for a gracious visit, which she knows he will allow upon her until that day come; and this is the last thing here recorded of the Bride's carriage in the Bridegroom's absence.

In the 16th verse, the faith of her interest in him, is, 1. asserted, 'My beloved is mine, and I am his.' 2. It is vindicated, or established against an objection in the following words, 'he feeds,' &c. The assertion holds out a union

betwixt him and her, 'I am his,' &c. or, as it is in the original, 'I am to him, and he is to me:' such as is the union betwixt married persons, Hos. 3:3, which the tie of marriage brings on: even such is this which follows covenanting with God; for, this union presupposeth it, and is founded on it, Ezek. 16:8, 'I entered into a covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine,' or 'to me;' although (saith she) he be not here, yet he is my husband, and that tie stands betwixt me and him, which is no little privilege; and in this she comforts herself under absence.

Observe. First, there is an excellent union, and peculiar tie betwixt Christ and believers, which none other can lay claim to but they: It's excellent, as will easily appear, if we consider these properties of it. 1. It's a near union, they are 'one flesh,' Eph. 5:27, as man and wife; 'they are flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone.' 2. It's a real and not imaginary union (though it be spiritual and by faith) it makes and transfers a mutual right of the one to the other, and hath real effects. 3. It's mutual on both sides, Christ is wholly hers, and she is wholly dedicated to him. 4. It's a kindly union, such as is betwixt husband and wife, and followed with the fruits of a most sweet relation. 5. It's a union which is some way full; whole Christ is hers, and she by consent and title is wholly his. 6. It is an indissolvable union, there is no dissolving of it by any thing that can fall out, other wise the consolation were not solid.

Again, *Observe.* 2. That this relation which the believer hath to Christ, is the great ground of his happiness and consolation, and not any sensible presence, or any dispensation, or gift communicated by Christ to him. 3. That believers may attain assurance, and clearness anent their interest in him, and may come to know really that Christ is theirs, and believers should aim to be through in this, that their 'calling and election may be made sure' to themselves, 2 Pet. 1:10. 4. Believers when they have attained clearness, should acknowledge it, and comfort themselves in it, and not raise new disputes about it. 5. This clearness may consist with absence and want of sensible presence, and there is no case, wherein a believer should stick faster to his confidence, than in such a case, when under desertion and absence, as the Spouse doth here.

2. She vindicates her faith in these words, 'He feedeth among the lilies.' The words may be looked upon as the reventing of an objection, for it might be said, If Christ be yours, where is he? Is it likely that he is yours, when he is so far away? For, the faith of clearness will be assaulted and set upon, and it is not easily maintained, and unbelief takes the advantage of Christ's absence from sense, to brangle it; so that unbelief and temptation especially sets on then: therefore, she answers it thus, 'He feedeth among the lilies,' that is, he is kind to his people, and present with them, though now I see him not; faith may, and will argue from

Christ's love to his people in general, and from the promises that speak to all, when there seems to be nothing singular in the believer's own condition, from which he can take comfort. By lilies are understood all believers: the church was called a lily, verse 2. Here all believers are so called, as partaking of that same beauty and savour, and because planted in the same true garden. Christ was called a lily, verse 1. and here all believers are called lilies, shewing, 1. That all believers have a conformity to Christ, and partake of the divine nature and Spirit that is in him. 2. That all believers in things that are essential to grace and holiness, have conformity one to another, they have the same faith, Spirit, covenant, Husband, &c. although in circumstantials and degrees, there be differences. Next, this 'feeding' amongst them, shews, 1. A special gracious presence in his church, and among believers; there he 'walketh among the seven golden candlesticks,' Rev. 2:1. 2. A special delight he hath in them, and satisfaction to be amongst them, as a man delighteth to walk in his garden: it is 'his meat' (John 4:32,34.) 'and drink' to do them good; so then (saith she) he is kind to all his people, and is so to me, though for the time I see him not: and thus also she answers the question, chap. 6:1,2, even when Christ is a-seeking, and she was enquiring after him. *Observe.* 1. Christ's care of his church, and love to his Bride, is no less under absence, than when his presence is sensibly enjoyed. The consideration of this, tends much to further the consolation of believers, and it becomes them well to believe this, when under desertion and absence, and so to ward off temptations.

The solid exercise of faith never wants hope waiting on it, therefore, 2dly, Verse 17, that follows, for completing the Bride's consolation in these words, 'until the day break, and the shadows,' &c. Though there be shadows (saith she) and vails betwixt him and me, in this night of desertion; yet there is a day coming when these, by his presence, shall be made to flee away, and I shall see him as he is. There is a twofold day spoken of in scripture, 1. A day of Christ's presence here upon earth, Luke 1:78. 'The day-spring from on high hath visited us.' 2. The day of his glorious appearing, commonly called the great day; and in a singular way called here 'the day,' because it hath no night of interruption following thereupon, and because it goes as far beyond what believers possess now, as day exceeds the night; therefore it is called 'the morning,' Psalm 49:14, in which the just shall have the dominion; and, the dawning of the day, and, the rising of the day-star in our hearts, 2 Pet. 1:19, which is there opposed to the clearest prophecies and ordinances, which are but as a candle in a dark place in respect of that day.

Now we conceive the last and great day is signified here, I. Because that is her scope, to comfort herself in the hope of what is coming. II. Because she opposeth it to the present means, as to shadows, even to faith itself, for that she

enjoyed for the time; and also to sensible presence, which in the next words she prays for, till the day dawn. By 'shadows' is meant, whatever mars the immediate, full, and satisfying enjoying of Christ, which as shadows, hides him from us, or darkens him that we do not see him as he is, or gives but small and dark representations of him, (like shadows of the body) which are very unproportioned unto his own excellent worth. They are said to 'flee away,' because a glimpse of Christ then, when he who is the Sun of righteousness, shall shine at the break of that day, shall dispel and dissipate them more fully and quickly, than this natural sun when rising, doth scatter darkness and shadows that go before it. And by 'until,' we understand the setting of a fixed term, which distinguisheth one time from another, as Gen. 32:26, 'I will not let thee go until thou bless me;' so saith she, until that day of immediate presence come, let me have love-visits, as is expressed in the following words. *Observe.* 1. There is an excellent day coming to believers, wherein Christ shall be immediately enjoyed and seen, and wherein the soul shall be comforted with no mediate object, or created excellency, but shall see his face, and be filled with the fulness of God. 2. While here there are many shadows even betwixt Christ and the strongest believers; 'we see but darkly as in a glass,' 1 Cor. 13:12. There is, 1. A shadow of desertion, and his hiding of himself. 2. A shadow of ordinances, where he is seen, yet but darkly, like a face in a looking-glass. 3. A shadow of sinful infirmities, drawing veils betwixt Christ and us, and hiding his face from us, Isa. 59:2. 4. A shadow of natural infirmity; for, not only are we ready through unbelief to slander him, but by reason of weakness (like narrow or old bottles) we are not capable of him, and unable to contain him.

III. At that day of his appearing, all these shadows will instantly be done away: there will not one tear be left on any believer's cheeks, there will be no affliction or desertion to hide him from them, but they shall be for ever with him there will then be no ordinances, nor temple, Rev. 21:22, 'but the Lord God, and the Lamb himself, shall be the temple' and light of his people: nor will there be any sinful infirmities then to interpose betwixt him and them; death, the curse and corruption, will be cast into the lake: no unclean thing accompanies the believer into the New Jerusalem; nay, no imperfect thing is there, for whatever is imperfect, and whatever was in part, is then done away, 1 Cor. 13:10, and what is perfect will then come; the soul in its faculties will then be perfected, capacitated and dilated, to conceive, take up, and delight in God; and the body perfected, made glorious and spiritual, like the glorious body of our Lord Jesus, Phil. 3:*ult.* 4. The hope of that day, and of the fleeing away of all shadows then, is (and no marvel it be) very refreshful to the Lord's people; and believers in all their darknesses should comfort themselves and others from the hope of it, 1 Thess. 4:*ult.* 5. And all that are Christ's, or whoever have faith in Christ, and fellowship

with him by virtue of his covenant, may expect at that day to enjoy Christ immediately and fully, and to see him as he is: O that men believed this! and that many were thronging into his covenant now, as they would not desire to be cast from his presence in that day! yet, 6. All shadows are never removed till then; the believer must, and some way will submit to Christ's way of ordering it so, and not seek it should be otherwise till then.

In the last place, the Bride falls about the exercise of prayer, in the rest of this verse; faith and hope in exercise always stir up to prayer: for, these graces do not foster laziness and security, but incite and provoke to duty (it is a good token when faith and hope are so accompanied) therefore she turns her to prayer, in which she speaks to him as to her beloved: clearness of interest, as it helps notably to many things, so to confidence in prayer especially. The petition (importing still absence) hath these two in it, 1. The suit itself, 'turn.' 2. The enforcing and enlarging of it, 'be like a roe,' &c. Turning here, implies, 1. Sense and feeling of his absence. 2. Her serious desire to have Christ again. 3. That his absence may be removed by his own returning, and so the change of her case to the better must flow from him. And, 4. That she may ask this from him, and expect by prayer in faith to obtain it, believing prayer being the best means to effectuate this. Next, she enforceth and enlargeth her petition, 'be thou like a roe,' &c. that is, seeing (saith she) all shadows will not be removed till that time, what is my suit for the time? it is even this, that thou wilt give me visits of thy presence, and be like 'a roe or a young hart on the mountains of Bether.' The word 'Bether,' signifies division, and so it may be made use of here: so long (saith she) as these mountains divide betwixt me and thee, Lord, be not a stranger, but swiftly, easily, and kindly (as the roes come over mountains to their mates, Prov. 5:19.) come thou to me, and comfort me with frequent love-visits, until that time come, that thou take me to thee, to enjoy thee fully and immediately.

Observe. 1. It is lawful for believers to desire sensible presence, even here-away: yea, it is suitable, they should often long and pray for it. 2. Where the hope of heaven is solid, sensible manifestations of Christ's love will be most ardently sought for: it will never prejudice one of their satisfaction and full payment, then, that they have gotten a large earnest-penny here, she knows that will never be reckoned up to her. 3. Much prayer, flowing from, and waiting upon the exercise of faith and hope, is a notable way to bring the soul to the enjoyment of sense. 4. The believer hath a heartsome life, and a rich inheritance, Christ here, and Christ hereafter; 'the lines are fallen unto him in pleasant places.' 5. She grounds her suit on the marriage-relation and tie betwixt him and her, 'my Beloved' (saith she). A covenant-claim to Christ, is the most solid ground upon which believers can walk

in their approaches before him, and in their pleadings with him. 6. He allows believers to plead for his company, from this ground, that he is theirs by covenant, as he pleads for their company, on that same ground, verse 10, &c.

Visit *Fire and Ice: Puritan and Reformed Sermons* at
<http://www.puritansermons.com/>