

SERMON III.

THE NATURE AND BEAUTY OF GOSPEL WORSHIP.

By John Owenⁱ

"For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." Eph. ii. 18.

IN the foregoing verses the apostle makes mention of a double reconciliation, wrought by the blood of the cross,—the one, of the Jews and Gentles unto God; the other, of the same persons one to another. There were two things in the law:—First, Worship instituted under it; Secondly, The curse annexed unto it. The first of these being appropriated to the Jews, with an exclusion of the Gentles, was the cause of unspeakable enmity and hatred between them. The latter, or the curse, falling upon both, was a cause of enmity between God and both of them. The Lord Jesus Christ, in his death removing both these, wrought and effected the twofold reconciliation mentioned. First, He brake down "the middle wall of partition between us," verse 14, and so "made both one;" that is, "between us,"—the Jews and Gentles. He hath taken away all cause of difference that should hinder us to be one in him. And how hath he done this? By taking away "the law of commandments contained in ordinances, verse 15;—that is, by abolishing that way of worship which was the Jews' privilege and burden, from which the Gentles were excluded: so breaking down that wall of partition. Secondly, By the cross at his death he slew the enmity, or took away the curse of the law; so reconciling both Jews and Gentles unto God; as verse 16. By bearing the curse of the law, he reconciled both unto God;—by taking away and abolishing the worship of the law, he took away all grounds of difference amongst them.

Upon this reconciliation ensueth a twofold advantage or privilege;—an access into the favour of God, who before was at enmity with them; and a new and more glorious way of approaching unto God in his worship than that about which they were before at difference among themselves.

The first of these is mentioned. Rom. v. 2. And that which is there called, an "access into this grace wherein we stand," may in the text be called, an "access unto the Father;" that is, the favour and acceptance with God which we do enjoy. Thus our access unto God is our sense of acceptance with him upon the reconciliation made for us by Jesus Christ. But this seems not to me to be the special intendment of the text; for that access unto God here mentioned seems to be the effect of the reconciliation of the Jews and Gentles among themselves, by the abolishing of the ceremonial worship;—a new and more glorious way of worship being now provided for them both in common, is there expressed. Before the reconciliation made, one party alone had the privilege of the carnal

worship then instituted; but now both parties have in common such a way of worship, wherein they have immediate access unto God;—in which the apostle asserts the beauty and glory of the gospel worship of Jews and Gentles above that which, enjoyed by the Jews, was a matter of separation and division between them. And this appears to be the intendment of the words from verse 17. That which is here asserted, is not an immediate effect of the reconciliation made by the blood of Christ on the cross, but of his preaching peace unto, and calling both Jews and Gentles,—gathering them unto himself, and so to the worship of God. Being called by the word of peace, both the one and the other, as to our worship, we have this access.

And the following words, to the end of the chapter, do make it yet mere plain and evident. Sundry things doth the apostle, upon the account of this their access unto God, speak of the Gentles.

First, Negatively, —that they are no more "strangers and foreigners," verse 19; that is, that they are not so in respect of the worship of God, as in that state and condition wherein they were before their calling, through a participation of the reconciliation made by the blood of Christ. The apostle had declared, verses 11, 12, they were the uncircumcision, aliens, foreigners: that is, men who had no share in, nor admittance unto the solemn worship of God, which was empaled in the commonwealth of Israel. "But now," says he, "ye are so no more;" that is, you have a portion and interest in that worship wherewith God is well pleased.

Secondly, Positively, the apostle affirms two things of them:— first, That they are "fellow—citizens with the saints, and of the household of God," verse 19; secondly, That they were built up to be "an holy temple," or "an habitation to God," verses 20—22. Both which relate to the solemn worship of God under the gospel. The first asserts them to be now members of the church;—the latter, that by and among them God was worshipped with that divine service which came in the room of that which was appointed in the temple, now by Christ removed and taken away.

This being the design of the Holy Ghost in this place, I shall present it in this one proposition unto you:—

That it is an eminent effect of our fruit of our reconciliation unto God and among ourselves, by the blood of Christ, that believers enjoy the privileges of the excellent, glorious, spiritual worship of God in Christ, revealed and required in the gospel.

I shall, in the prosecution of this subject., **I.** Briefly prove that we obtain this privilege as a fruit, and upon the account of the reconciliation made by the blood of Christ. **II.** Show that the worship of the gospel is indeed so beautiful, glorious, and excellent, that the enjoyment of it is an eminent privilege: which I shall principally manifest from the text; and, in so doing, open the several parts of it.

I. That believers enjoy this privilege as a fruit and effect of the death and blood of Jesus

Christ, I shall confirm only with one or two places of Scripture, Heb. ix. 8, compared with chap. x. 19—22. Whilst the first tabernacle was standing, before Christ by his death had removed it, and the worship that accompanied it,—which was the partition—wall mentioned that he brake down,—there was no immediate admission unto God;—the way into the holiest not made with hands, which we now make use of in the gospel worship, was not yet laid open, but the worshippers were kept at a great distance, making their application unto God by outward, carnal ordinances. The tabernacle being removed, now a way is made, and an entrance is given to the worshippers, into the holiest, in their worship. How is that obtained by what means? Chap. x. 19—22, It is "by the blood of Jesus Christ,"—by the rending of his flesh. This privilege of entering into the holiest, which is a true expressing of all gospel worship, could no otherwise be obtained for nor granted unto believers, but by the blood of Christ. We "enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus," by which he prepared, perfected, or "consecrated for us a new and living way" into it. Peter also gives us the same account of the rise of this privilege, 1 Epist. ii. 4, 5. That which is ascribed unto believers is, that they offer up "spiritual sacrifices, acceptable unto God by Jesus Christ." That is the worship whereof we speak. To fit them for, and enable them hereunto, they are "made a spiritual house, a holy priesthood;"—they are both the temple wherein God dwells by his Spirit, and they are the priests that offer acceptable sacrifices unto him. By what means, then, do they attain this honour? By their "coming unto Christ," and that as he was "disallowed of men, and chosen of God." Herein the apostle includes the whole mystery of his death and blood—shedding, wherein he was most openly rejected of men, and most eminently owned of God in his accomplishment of the work of reconciliation.

I shall not farther confirm the first part of the proposition, but proceed to evidence,—

II. That the worship of God under the gospel is so excellent, beautiful, and glorious, that it may well be esteemed a privilege, purchased by the blood of Christ, which no man can truly and really be made partaker of but by virtue of an interest in the reconciliation by him wrought. For "through him we have an access by one Spirit unto God."

This, as I said, I shall evince two ways:—**FIRST**, *Absolutely*. **SECONDLY**, *Comparatively*, in reference unto any other way of worship whatever.

And the **FIRST** I shall do from the text.

A is a principle deeply fixed in the minds of men, yea, ingrafted into them by nature, that the worship of God ought to be orderly, comely, beautiful, and glorious. Hence men in all ages, who have thought it incumbent on them to imagine, find out, and frame the worship of God, or any thing thereunto belonging, have made it constantly their design to fix on things, either in themselves or in the manner of their performance (to their judgment), beautiful, orderly, comely, and glorious. And, indeed, that worship may be well suspected not to be according to the mind of God, which comes short in these properties of order and beauty, comeliness and glory. I shall add unto this only this reasonable assertion, which no man can well deny,—viz., that what is so in his worship and service, God

himself is the most proper judge. If, then, we evince not that spiritual gospel worship, in its own naked simplicity, without any other external adventitious helper or countenance, is most orderly, comely, beautiful, and glorious (the Holy Ghost in the Scripture being judge), we shall be content to seek for these things where else, as it is pretended, they may be found. To this end,—

1. The first thing in general observable from these words is, that in the spiritual worship of the gospel the whole blessed Trinity, and each person therein distinctly, do in that economy and dispensation wherein they act severally and peculiarly in the work of our redemption, afford distinct communion with themselves unto the souls of the worshippers. So are they all here distinctly mentioned: "Through him" (that is, Jesus Christ, the Son of God) "we have access by one Spirit" (that good and holy Spirit the Holy Ghost) unto God, that is the Father;" for so is that name to be taken *υποστατικω*" "personally," when it is mentioned in distinction from the Son and Spirit. There is no act, part, or duty of gospel worship, wherein the worshippers have not this distinct communion with each person in the blessed Trinity. The particulars shall be afterward spoken unto.

This is the general order of gospel worship, the great rubric of our service. Here in general hath its decency, that it respects the mediation of the Son, through whom we have access, and the supplies and assistance of the Spirit, and a regard unto God as a Father. He that fails in any one of these, he breaks all order in gospel worship. If either we come not unto it by Jesus Christ, or perform it not in the strength of the Holy Ghost, or in it go not unto God as a Father, we transgress all the rules of this worship. This is the great canon, which if it be neglected, there is no decency in whatever else is done in this way. And this, in general, is the glory of it. Worship is certainly an act of the soul, Matt. xxii. 37. The body hath its share by concomitancy and subserviency to the direction of the mind. The acts of the mind and soul receive their advancements and glory from the object about which they are conversant. Now that, in this gospel worship, is God himself in his Son and holy Ghost, and none else. Acting faith on Christ for admission; and on the Holy Ghost for his assistance (so going on in his strength); and on God, even the Father, for acceptance,—is the work of the soul in this worship. That it hath any thing more glorious to be conversant about, I am as yet to learn. But these things will be handled apart afterward. This, in general, is the order and glory of that worship of which we speak.

2. The same is evident from the general nature of it,—that it is an access unto God. "Through him we have an access to God." There are two things herein that set forth the excellency, order, and glory of it:—d.) It brings an access; (2.) The manner of that access, intimated in the word here used; it is *προσαγωγή*.

(1.) It is an access, an approach, a drawing nigh unto God; so the apostle calls it a "drawing near," Heb. x. 22, "Let us draw near with a true heart;" that is, unto God, in "the holiest," verse 19. In the first giving out of the law, and instituting the legal worship, the people were commanded to keep at a distance; and they were not, on pain of death, so much as to touch the mount where the presence of God was, Exod. xix. 12. And, accordingly, they stood afar oft; whilst Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was, chap. xx. 21. So, not only when the high priest went into the most holy place once

a—year with blood (of which afterward), but when the priests in their courses went into the holy place to burn incense daily, the people were kept without, as Luke i. 10. But this gospel worship is our access or drawing nigh to God; no interposition of veils, or any other carnal ordinance whatever. All is made open, and a new and living way of access given unto us, Heb. x. 20. And what, in general, can be added to set forth the glory of this worship, to a soul that knows what it is to draw nigh to God, I know not. The heathens of old derided the Egyptians, who, through many stately edifices, and with most pompous ceremonies, brought their worshippers to the image of an ape. I say no more; but let them look to it, how they will acquit themselves who frame much of their worship in a ceremonious access to an altar or an image. The plea of referring unto God at the last hath been common to all idolaters, of what sort soever, from the foundation of the world.

(2.) It is a *προσαγωγή* that we have in this worship;—a manuduction unto God, in order, and with much glory. It is such an access as men have to the presence of a king, when they are handed in by some favourite or great person. This, in this worship, is done by Christ. He takes the worshippers by the hand, and leads them into the presence of God; there presenting them (as we shall see), saying, "Behold I and the children which God hath given me," Heb. ii. 13. This is the access of believers; thus do they enter into the presence of God. Some, it may be, will be ready to say, that a man may be ashamed to speak such great things as these of poor worms, who have neither order in their way, nor eloquence in their words, nor comeliness in their worship. Let such men know that they must yet hear greater things of them: and it is meet, indeed, they should be in all things conformable unto Christ; and, therefore, have neither form, minor comeliness, nor beauty in themselves, their way, or their worship, to the eyes of the world, as Isa. liii. 2. And "the world knows not them" and their ways, because "it knew not him" nor his ways, 1 John iii. 1. But if God may be allowed to judge in his own matters, the spiritual worship of the saints is glorious, since in it they have such an access, such a manuduction unto God.

3. From the immediate object of this worship; and that is God. We have an access to God. It is, as I said, the Father who is here peculiarly intended. God, as God,—he who is the beginning and end of all, whose nature is attended with infinite perfection,—he from whom a sovereignty over all doth proceed,—is the formal object of all divine and religious worship. Hence, divine worship respects, as its object, each person of the blessed Trinity equally, not as this or that person, but as this or that person is God; that is the formal reason of all divine worship. But yet, as the second person is considered as vested with his office of mediation, and the Holy Ghost as the comforter and sanctifier of his saints; so God the Father is in a peculiar manner the object of our faith, and love, and worship. So Peter tells us, 1 Epist. i. 21, that through Christ we "believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory." Christ being considered as mediator, God that raised him from the dead—that is, the Father—is regarded as the ultimate object of our worship; though worshipping him who is the Father as God, the other persons are in the same nature worshipped. This whole matter is declared, Gal. iv. 6 (which I cannot now particularly open), with this explanation, that in our access unto God, Christ being considered as the mediator, and the Holy Ghost as our comforter, advocate, and assister, the saints have a peculiar respect unto the person of the Father.

There are two things that hence arise, evidencing the order, decency, and glory of gospel worship —(1.) That we have in it a direct and immediate access unto God; (2.) That we have access unto God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and ours in him.

(1.) This is no small part of the glory of this worship, that our access is unto *God himself*. When outward worship was in its height and glory, the access of the worshippers immediately was but unto some visible sign and pledge of God's presence. Such as the temple itself; such was the ark and the mercy—seat. So Paul, describing the tabernacle and temple worshippers, Heb. x. 1, calls them *προσερχομένους*, "the comers unto sacrifices." There was, as it were, a stop put upon their access, in the visible representations of God's majesty and to which they did and presence to which they did approach. But now, in this spiritual worship of the gospel, the saints have direct and immediate access unto God,— "the way into the holiest," not made with hands, being laid open unto them all. And where they are enjoined the use of any outward signs, as in the sacraments, it is not, as it were, to stop them there from entering into heaven, but to help them forward in their entrance; as all know who are acquainted with their true nature and use. I do not say that any of the worship of God was limited in the sensible pledge and tokens of God's presence; but only that the spirit of the worshippers was kept in subjection, so as to approach unto God only as he exhibited himself to their faith in those signs, and not immediately, as we do under the gospel.

(2.) We have in this spiritual worship of the gospel access unto God *as a Father*. I showed, in the opening of the words, that God is distinctly proposed here as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him our God and Father. Hence are we said to come "to the throne of grace," Heb. iv. 16: that is, unto God as he is gloriously exalted in the dispensation of grace, in kindness, love, mercy,—in a word, as a Father. God on the throne of grace, and God as a Father, is all one consideration; for, as a Father, he is all love, grace, and mercy to his children in Christ. When God came of old to institute his worship in giving of the law, he did it with the dreadful and terrible representation of his majesty, that the people chose not to come near, but went and "stood afar off, and said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die," Exod. xx. 18, 19. And by this dreadful representation of the majesty of God, as the object of that worship, were they kept in fear and bondage all their days. But now axe the saints encouraged to make their approach unto God as a Father; the glory whereof the apostle excellently expresseth, Rom. viii. 14, 15. That fear and bondage wherein men were kept under the law is now removed, and in the place thereof a spirit of children, with reverent boldness going to their father, is given unto us. This, I say, adds to the glory, beauty, and excellency of gospel worship. There is not the meanest believer but, with his most broken prayers and supplications, hath an immediate access unto God, and that as a Father; nor the most despised church of saints on the earth but it comes with its worship into the glorious presence of God himself. And this I shall add, by the way,—that men's attempting to worship God who are not interested in this privilege of access unto him, is the ground of all the superstitious idolatry that is in the world. I shall instance in two things, which are the springs of all others:—

[1.] Having not experience of the excellency of this privilege, nor being satisfied with the

use of it, men have turned aside to the worship of saints and angels in heaven. This is the very substance of all the reasons that the Papists plead in the justification of that superstition: "To have access to God! It is too great a boldness to come to him immediately; and so it becomes us humbly to make use of the favourites of the court of heaven, of saints and angels, to desire them to entreat with God for us." Now, not to speak of their unacquaintedness with the mediation of Christ herein, which is plain infidelity, what is this but directly saying, "We understand nothing of gospel worship (wherein believers by Christ have a direct 'access with boldness' to God himself); and therefore it is that we had rather fix on this 'voluntary humility,' as the apostle calls it, Col. ii. 18, than venture on this access unto God"? This, I say, is the reasoning of men unacquainted with this part of the glory of gospel worship.

[2.] Hence are they forced to invent outward, visible pledges and signs of God's presence, as they imagine, to which they may have access; seeing they are unacquainted with that which is directly unto God himself. Hence images and pictures, altars and the *east*, must be regarded in worship; with which they can have an immediate conversation,——have an access in their thoughts to them, and, as they think, by them unto God. And on the same account must the sacraments be changed, and that which was appointed to assist us in our entrance unto God be made a god, that men may have an easy access unto him. Carnal men, that know nothing of the other, whose souls are not at all moulded or affected by any pure act of faith, are here stirred by their senses, and act by them in their worship. And this is the ground wherein all their pompous rites, invented by men in the worship of God, do grow;—even a design and engine to afford carnally—minded men somewhat to be conversant about in their worship, who have no principle to enable them to use this privilege to approaching unto God himself. It is true, they will say it is God alone whom they worship, and whom they intend to draw nigh unto; but I must needs say, that if they knew what it were to do so immediately by Christ, they would be satisfied therewith, and not seek such outward helps in their way as they do.

4. It appears from the principal procuring cause and means of this our access to God; which is Jesus Christ,—through him we have this access. This is a new spring of beauty and glory, which we must consider in the particulars of it. That access which the people of God had to the outward pledge of his presence, was by their high priest; and that not in his own person, but barely in his representation of them; and that but once a year: but in the worship of the gospel, the saints have an access through Christ unto God himself in their own persons, and that continually. Now, we have this access through Christ upon many accounts

(1.) Because he hath purchased and procured this favour for us, that we should so approach unto God, and find acceptance with him. We are "accepted in the Beloved," Eph. i. 6. I must not stay to show how, by paying a ransom for us, and "bearing our iniquities," he hath answered the law, removed the curse, reconciled us to God, pacified his anger, satisfied justice, procured for us eternal redemption; all which belongs to his procuring for us this favour of acceptance with God. The apostle gives us the sum of it, Heb. ii. 17, He hath, as a high priest, "made reconciliation for the sins of the people;" on the account whereof they have an "access by faith into this grace," Rom. v. 1, 2. In this

sense have we our access unto God through Christ. He hath purchased it for us. It is no small portion of the price of his blood. Nothing else could procure it;—not all the wealth of the world, not all the worth of angels in heaven: none could do it but himself. Go into the most pompous, stately place of outward worship upon the earth,—consider all the wealth and glory of its structure and ornaments; it is an easy thing for a wise man to guess what it all cost, and what is the charge of it. However, none so foolish, but can tell you it is all the price of money; it was bought with "silver and gold," and "corruptible things;" it is the "thick clay:" and he that hath most money may render that kind of worship most beautiful and glorious. But now the gospel worship of believers is the price of the "blood of the Son of God." Access to God for sinners could no other way be obtained. Let men, as the prophet speaks, "lavish gold out of their bags" (Isa. xlvi. 6) upon their idols their self—invented worship shall come as short, in true glory and beauty, of the meanest prayers of poor saints, as the purchase of corruptible things doth of the fruit of the blood and death of the Son of God, 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

(2.) We have this access from Christ, inasmuch as he hath opened, prepared, and dedicated a way for us to enter into the presence of God. Favour being procured, a way of entrance is also to be provided; otherwise poor souls might say, "There is water, indeed, in the well; but the well is deep, and we have not wherewith to draw. There is an acceptance purchased for us in the presence of God; but by what way shall we come unto him?" I say, he hath provided for us also a way whereby we may enter, Heb. x. 19, 20,— "By a new and living way." The way into the holiest, of old, was through the vail that hung always before; which the apostle calls "the second vail," chap. ix. 3. The form and use thereof you have, Exod. xxvi. 31, 32, etc. Through this vail the high priest entered into the holy place. Instead hereof, for an entrance into the presence of God in the holy place not made with hands, Christ hath provided and dedicated a "new and living way" for us. This way is himself; as he telleth Thomas, John xiv. 6, "I am the way." It is by him alone that any can obtain an access unto God. But as to our constant approach in worship, there is a peculiar respect had unto his suffering for us in the flesh. We enter "by his blood," and "through his flesh." How is that? As men being to go to some great potentate or general in an army have, it may be, some word or token which they show, declare, or make use of if by any they are hindered in their address,—so it is with believers. The law would stop them in their access to God; so would sin and Satan: but their being "sprinkled with the blood of Christ" is the token that hays all open unto them, and removes all obstacles out of the way;— and when they come into the presence of God, it is the suffering of Christ in the flesh that they insist on as to their acceptance with him. They go to God through him, in his name, "making mention of his righteousness," death, and bloodshedding, pleading for acceptance on his account. This is their "new and living way" of going unto God;—this path they tread, this entrance they use; and no man can obtain an access unto God but by an interest herein. I wonder not at all that men who know not this way—who have no share, nor ever took one step in it—do fix on any kind of worship whatever, rather than once make trial what it is to place the glory of their worship in an access unto God, seeing they have no interest in this way, without which all attempts after it would be altogether fruitless and vain. Now, this adds to the order, and increaseth the glory and beauty, of the spiritual worship of the gospel. Go to the mass—book and the rubric of it;—you will see how many instructions and directions they give

priests about the way of going into their sanctum and to their altars;—how they must bow and bend themselves, sometimes one way sometimes another; sometimes kneel, sometimes stand; sometimes go backwards, sometimes forward. This is their way to the bready god; this they call order, and beauty, and glory; and with such like things are poor, simple sots deluded, and carnal wretches, enemies to Christ and his Spirit, blinded to their eternal ruin. Surely, methinks, this way of gospel access to God is far more comely and glorious:—it is in and by Christ,—a way dedicated by himself on purpose; it is sprinkled with his blood; it is opened by his suffering in the flesh, and abides "new and living" for ever. Were not blindness come on men to the utmost,—were it not evident that they can see nothing afar off,—that they are wholly carnal and unspiritual, "savouring not the things of God,"—it were impossible that they should reject these pearls of the gospel for the husks of swine, such things as they shall never be able to vie with the old heathen in. This only may be said in their excuse, that they cast away and reject what they had no share in, for that which is most properly their own.

(3.) We have this access through Christ, in that he is entered before us into the presence of God, to make way for our access unto him, and our acceptance with him. So the apostle, Heb. iv. 14, "We have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God." He is gone already into the presence of God to that purpose. The same apostle tells us, chap. vi. 19, 20, "Let us look to 'that within the veil, whither Jesus the forerunner is for us entered,'"— *πρόδρομος ἡμῶν εἰσῆλθεν*. The words are better rendered, "The forerunner for us is entered." He is a forerunner for us,—one that is gone into the presence of God to declare that all his saints are coming to him, coming into his presence with their solemn worship and oblations—he is entered into heaven himself, to carry, as it were, tidings, and make way for the entrance of his saints. This is no small encouragement to follow him: he is gone before for us, and is in continual expectation of the coming of them whose forerunner he is; as is the manner of those who take that office. And this also adds to the glory of gospel worship, with them to whom Christ is precious and honourable: with them by whom he is despised, it is no wonder if his ways be so also. This belongs also to the rubric, and adds to the order of gospel worship. It is an access to God, even the Father, in the holy place not made with hands, on the account of the atonement made, and favour and acceptance purchased, by Jesus Christ, being sprinkled with his blood, and following him, as one that is gone before to provide admittance for us. here is order and beauty too, if we have either faith or eyes to apprehend or perceive what is so.

(4.) We have this access through Christ, as he is "the high priest over the house of God." This the apostle at large declares, and much insists upon, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. One or two places shall suffice to instance in. Chap. iv. 14—16 : The inference which the apostle makes from this consideration, that Christ is our high priest entered into heaven, is, that we should draw nigh unto the throne of grace; and, because he is such a holy priest as he there describes, that we should draw nigh with boldness, or spiritual confidence of our acceptance with God. And this the apostle manageth at large throughout that epistle;—that notwithstanding all the outward glory and splendour of the legal worship, yet that which is appointed in the gospel is far to be preferred before it, inasmuch as the High Priest of this is unspeakably above the high priest by whom that

was principally administered. And again, chap. x. 21, 22, the encouragement to draw nigh to God is taken from this, that we have a "high priest over the house of God." And it is also considerable, what the Holy Ghost requireth in them who should come nigh to worship God under the guidance and conduct of this blessed and merciful high priest. Is it that they have such vestments and ornaments in their admission? No; but faith, and sanctification, and holiness, are the three great qualifications of these worshippers. "Let us draw nigh," saith he, "in full assurance of faith," etc., "and our bodies washed with pure water;"—that is, purified with the blood of Christ, typified in the water of baptism; or else, it may be, effectually cleansed in soul and body by the Holy Ghost, who is frequently compared to water in the work of purifying and sanctifying the souls of believers.

Upon this general head I might make a long stand, to evidence the beauty, order, and glory of the spiritual worship of God, in that it is our access to God through Christ, "as the great high priest over the house of God." This, indeed, is so great, that the apostle makes it the sum of his whole dispute about the excellency of the gospel, and our coming to God thereby, Heb. viii. 1, 2. "This is," saith he, "upon the matter, the sum of all: Those with whom we have to do, they had a high priest, in whom, and the administration by him performed, consisted the glory of all their worship. "We also," saith he, "have a high priest no less than they had; but herein there is no comparison between them and us, that we have such a high priest,"—whom he describes;—first, from his own dignity, honour, and glory; he is "set on the right hand of the Majesty of heaven;"—secondly, from his office or ministry,—namely, that he ministers not in a tabernacle, such as was that of Moses, and Solomon's temple, but in heaven itself the place of the glorious presence and immediate manifestation of God's glory;—which he calls "the tabernacle which the Lord pitched;" that is, which he appointed for the place of worship to his saints under the ministry of Christ, their high priest. And though other places are necessary here on earth for their assemblies, as they are men clothed with flesh and infirmities, yet there is none pitched, appointed, or consecrated for the holy and solemn acceptance of their service, but heaven itself; where the High Priest is always ready to administer it before God. And as to the assemblies here below, all places are now alike. And what can be more glorious than this,—namely, that the whole spiritual worship of the gospel, performed here on earth by the saints, is administered in heaven by such a holy Priest, who is at the right hand of the throne of the majesty of God! and yet under his conduct we have by faith an entrance into the presence of God.

Go to, now, you by whom the spiritual worship of the gospel is despised; [you] that—unless it be adorned, as you say (or rather defiled), with the rites and ceremonies of your own invention—think there is no order, comeliness, or beauty in it set yourselves to find out whatever pleaseth your imaginations; borrow this of the Jews, that of the Pagans, all of the Papists that you think conducing to that end and purpose; lavish gold out of the bag for the beautifying of it;—will it compare with this glory of the worship of the gospel, that is all carried on under the conduct and administration of this glorious High Priest? It may be they will say that they have that too, and that ornaments do not hinder but that they have also their worship attended with that glory relating to the holy Priest. But do they think so indeed? and do they no more value it than it seems they do? Why are they

not contented with it, but they must find out many inventions of their own to help to set it off? Surely it is impossible that men, thoroughly convinced of its spiritual excellency, should fall into that fond conceit of making additions of their own unto it. Nor do they seem rightly to weigh that the holy God doth, all along, oppose this spiritual excellency of gospel worship to the outward splendour of rites and ordinances, instituted by himself for a the; so that, what men seek to make up in these things doth but absolutely derogate from the other; and all will one day know, whether it be for want of excellency in the spiritual administration of the gospel worship, under and by the glorious High Priest, or for want of minds enlightened to discern it, and hearts quickened to experience it, that some do lay all the weight of the beauty of gospel worship on matters that they either find out themselves, or borrow from others who were confessedly blind as to all spiritual communion with God in Christ. But if any man list to contend, "we have no such custom, neither the church of God;" only I hope it will not be accounted a crime, that any please themselves and are contented with that glory and beauty, in their worshipping of God, which is given unto it from hence, that they have in it an access to God by Jesus Christ, as the great high priest of their profession and service. However, I am sure this is, and may well be, an unspeakable encouragement and comfort in the duty of drawing nigh unto God, to all the saints, whether in their persons, families, or assemblies,—that Jesus Christ is the great high priest that admits them to the presence of God; who is the minister of that heavenly tabernacle where God is worshipped by them. If we are but able, as the apostle speaks, to look to the things that are not seen, 2 Cor. iv. 18,—that is, with eyes of faith,—we shall find that glory that will give us rest and satisfaction; and for others, we may pray, as Elisha for his servant, that the Lord would open their eyes, and they would quickly see the naked, poor places of the saints' assemblies not only attended with horses and chariots of fire, but also Christ walking in the midst of them, in the glory wherewith he is described, Rev. i. 13—16; which surely their painted or carved images will be found to come short of. And if the Lord Jesus Christ be pleased, in his unspeakable love, to call his churches and ministers his "glory," as he doth, 2 Cor. viii. 23, surely these may be contented to make him their only glory. To which purpose we may observe,—

[1.] Our Saviour Christ warns us of some who thought to be heard for their heathenish "vain repetitions" and "much babbling," Matt. vi. 7. I will not make application of it unto any; but this I say, that men will not be a little mistaken, if they think to be heard for any carnal self—invented furtherance of their devotion. But here lies the joy and confidence of the poor saints,—they have a merciful High Priest over the house of God, by whom they are encouraged to draw nigh with boldness to the throne of grace. He takes them by the hand, and leads them into the presence of God; where, through his means, they obtain a favourable acceptance.

[2.] Nor need they be solicitous about their outward estate and condition. This was the misery of the Jews of old,—that when they were driven from Jerusalem, and carried into captivity, they were deprived of all the solemn worship of God; they had no high priest, no sacrifice, no altar, tabernacle, or solemn assemblies,—which were all tied to that place. Hence we find how bitterly David complains, when, by the persecution of Saul, he was for a season driven from the place of God's holy and solemn worship: he saw not the glorious ornaments of the high priest, nor the beautiful structure of the tabernacle, nor the

order of the Levites and priests in worship. It is now otherwise with the people of God, be they never so poor, and destitute of all outward accommodations. Are their assemblies in the mountains, in the caves and dens of the earth?—Christ, according to his promise, is in the midst of them as their high priest, and they have in their worship all the order, glory, and beauty (I mean, observing gospel rules) that in any place under heaven they can enjoy and be made partakers of. All depends on the presence of Christ, and their access to God by him; and he is excluded from no place, but thinks any place adorned sufficiently for him which his saints are met in or driven unto. Let the hands that hang down be lifted up, and feeble knees be strengthened;—whatever their outward, distressed condition may be, here is order, beauty, and glory, in the worship of God, above all that the world can pretend unto!

[3.] Here lies encouragement to them upon a spiritual account, as to the state of things between God and their own souls. They have discoveries made unto them of the glory, majesty, and holiness of God. They know that he is "a consuming fire;"—they have visions of his excellencies, which the world is not acquainted with. They are also sensible of their own poverty, wretchedness, sin, weakness,—how unfit, how unable to approach unto him, or to have to do with him in his holy worship;—they are ashamed of their own prayers and supplications, and could oftentimes, when they are gone through, wish them undone again, considering how unanswerable they are to the greatness and holiness of God. In this condition there is a plentiful relief tendered to faith from the consideration of this High Priest. That this may be more evident, and that the beauty and glory of gospel worship may be by them further discovered, I shall particularly insist on some parts of it:—

First. Our High Priest bears and takes away all the sinfulness and failings that are in or do accompany the holy worship of his saints. The world is apt to despise the worship of the saints, as mean and contemptible,—unmeet for the majesty of God. This puts them on the inventing of what they suppose more glorious and beautiful, though God abhors it. But the saints themselves know that of their defects, wants, and failings in their worship, that the world know not of, and how unfit it is and unsuited to the holy majesty of God, with whom they have to do. They know how the bitter root of unbelief in their hearts springs up and defiles them and their duties;—how effectually vanity works in their minds, and a secret loathness in their wills, in their best duties and most solemn acts of worship; besides innumerable other sinful distempers, that oftentimes get ground and place in their hearts. These, they know, are the things that, in and of themselves, are enough to defile, pollute, and render abominable all their worship; yea, and if God should "mark what is amiss," the guilt of their holy worship is enough to make both it and them that perform it to be for ever rejected. But now, here is their relief; here beauty, glory, and order, is recovered to their worship;—Christ, as their high priest, takes away all the evil, filth, and iniquity of their holy things, that they may be presented pure, and holy, and glorious before God. So did Aaron typically of old, *Exod. xxviii. 38*. Thus doth Christ, our high priest, really answer for all that is amiss. All failings, all miscarriages in his saints, them he takes on his own score; and what is from his Spirit, that enters into the presence of the holy God. So, *Eph. v. 25—27*, he presents it to himself, and by him it is presented unto God. By this means doth the Lord Christ preserve the glory and beauty of gospel worship,

notwithstanding all the defects, and failings, and defilements, that, from the weakness and sins of his saints, do seem to cleave unto it.

Secondly. This is not enough. Besides the weakness, sinfulness, and imperfections that attend their duties, for which they may be justly rejected, there is not any thing of worth in them for which they may be accepted;—nothing that should yield a sweet savour unto God. Wherefore Christ, as the high priest by whom all believers have their access unto God, takes their duties and prayers, and adds incense unto them, that they may have a sweet savour in heaven, Rev. viii. 3. The altar is the place for the priests offering their sacrifices of prayers; and our altar is in heaven: other men may appoint theirs elsewhere. The Lord Christ, the high priest in the temple of God in heaven, and in the holy place not made with hands, is the angel that stands at the altar before the Lord,—the golden altar of incense before the throne;— not the altar for sacrifice, which he hath finished already, but only the altar of incense or intercession, remains. On this golden altar are the prayers of all saints offered. But how came they to be acceptable unto the Lord? Why, this high priest hath much incense, a bottomless store and treasure of righteousness that he adds unto them; which is the only sweet perfume in the presence of the Lord. This makes all their worship glorious indeed. Christ, the high priest, takes away the iniquity and failings of them, he adds his own righteousness unto it; and so in his own person offers it on the golden altar (that is, his own self) before the throne of God continually.

Now, as this tends exceedingly to the consolation of believers so it stains the glory of all the outward pompous worship that some are so delighted in. For believers, what can more tend to their comfort and encouragement, than that the Lord Christ takes their poor weak prayers, which themselves are oftentimes ashamed of and humbled for, and are ready to cry out against themselves by reason of them; and what by taking away the evil of them, what by adding the incense of his own righteousness, makes them acceptable at the throne of grace! They little know what beauty and glory those very duties which they perform and are troubled at are clothed withal: and for the beauty and glory of gospel worship, in comparison of all the self—invented rites of men, how will one thought of faith about this administration of Christ in heaven with the prayers of the saints, cast contempt and shame upon them! What is all their gaudy preparation, in comparison of the high priest of the saints offering up their prayers on the golden altar before the throne of God! This is order, comeliness, and beauty.

Thirdly. Christ, as the high priest of the saints, presents both their persons and their duties in the presence of and before the Lord. This is that which was signified of old in the high priest's precious stones set in gold on his breast and shoulders, with the names of the children of Israel in them, Exod. xxviii. 21. Christ, our high priest, is entered into the holy place for us, and there presents all his saints and their worship before the Lord, being "not ashamed to call them brethren," and saying of them, "Behold I and the children which the Lord hath given me.

And this is the fourth thing in the words, manifesting the excellency and glory of gospel worship, taken from the principal procuring cause:—It is an access to God, *through Christ*.

SERMON IV

5. This also adds greatly to the glory and excellency of evangelical worship, that we have in it an access unto God, "in one Spirit," or "by one Spirit."

I shall show in brief,— (1.) How we have it "by the Spirit;" (2.) How "in one," or "by one Spirit."

(1.) That by the Spirit the Holy Ghost is here intended, is not questioned by any. He is that "one Spirit" who works in these things, and "divideth to every one as he pleaseth," I Cor. xii. 11. I shall not here handle the whole work of the Holy Ghost in and upon the souls of the saints, in and for the performance of all the duties of worship wherein they draw nigh unto God by Christ and obtain communion with him, as absolutely considered; but only so far as his work renders the worship we speak of beautiful and comely; which is the matter we have in hand. And that I shall do in some few considerations:— [1.] The Lord Jesus Christ hath promised to send his Spirit to believers, to enable them, both for matter and manner, in the performance of every duty required in the word, Isa. lix. 21. He will give his word and Spirit. The promise of the one and the other is of equal extent and latitude. Whatever God proposeth in his word to be believed, or requireth to be done,— that he gives his Spirit to enable to believe and do accordingly. There is neither promise nor precept, but the Spirit is given to enable believers to answer the mind of God in them; nor is the Spirit given to enable unto any duty, but what is in the word required. The Spirit and the word, in their several places, have an equal latitude; the one as a *moral rule*, the other as a *real principle of efficiency*. Hence they who require duties which the word enjoins not, have need of other assistances than what the Spirit of grace will afford them; and those who pretend to be led by the Spirit beyond the bounds of the word, had need provide themselves of another gospel. Now, with promises hereof doth the gospel abound. He shall "lead us into all truth;"—he shall "teach us all things;"— he shall "abide with us for ever." Having given his disciples precepts for their whole duty to God and himself, he promiseth them his Spirit to abide with them, to enable them for the accomplishment of them.

[2.] There are *three* things that are needful for the right performance of gospel worship — 1st. *Light and knowledge*, that we may be acquainted with the mind and will of God in it,—what it is that he accepteth and approveth, and is appointed by him; that we may know "how to choose the good and refuse the evil,"—like the sheep of Christ, hearing his voice and following him, not hearkening to the voice of a stranger. 2dly. *Grace* in the heart, so that there may be, in this access unto God, a true, real, spiritual, saving communion, obtained with him in those acts of faith, love, delight, and obedience, which he requireth; without which it is in any thing "impossible to please God." 3dly. *Ability* for the performance of the duties that God requireth in his worship, in such a manner as he may be glorified, and those who are called to his worship edified in their most holy faith. Where these three concur, there the worship of God is performed in a due manner,

according to his own mind and will; and so, consequently, is excellent, beautiful, and glorious, —God himself being judge. Now, all these do believers receive by and from the Spirit of Christ; and, consequently, have by him their access to the Father; that is, are enabled unto, and carried on in, the worship which God requireth at their hands.

1st. It is he who enables them to discover the mind of God, and his will concerning his worship, that they may embrace what he hath appointed, and refuse the thing whereof he will say at the last day, "Who hath required this at your hand?" He is promised to "lead them into all truth," as the Spirit of truth, John xvi. 13; and is the blessed "unction" that teacheth them all things, 1 John ii. 27,—all things for the glory of God, and their own consolation. It is he that speaks the word, which sounds in the ears, "This is the way; walk in it." And when Paul prays for the guidance of the saints, he doth it by praying that God would give them the "Spirit of wisdom and revelation" in Christ, Eph. i. 17. Now, this he doth two ways:— (1st.) By causing them diligently to attend unto the word, the voice of Christ, for their direction, and to that only. This is the great work of the Spirit. So John xvi. 13, it is said, "He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak;"—that is, he shall reveal and declare nothing but what is the mind of Christ manifested in the word; and that he shall call men to attend unto. "To the law and to the testimony" (to the word),—that. is his constant voice. If men turn to any other teaching, they go out of the compass of his commission,—that direction which the Father began from heaven, "This is my beloved Son; hear him." He is the only master and teacher that the Spirit carries all believers unto, he still cries, "Hear him; attend unto him speaking in the word." It is true, in point of practice, according to the rule for the remedying of scandals and disorders, we are commanded to "hear the church," or obey the wholesome directions of it, and to walk according to the gospel; but as to the worship of God, both as to the matter and rules in the appointment of it, we are called continually by the Spirit to hear Christ always;—and that spirit is not of Christ which sends us to any else.

(2dly.) By revealing the mind of Christ unto us in the word. This is his work, which he undertakes and performs. I confess that, notwithstanding the assistance that he is ready to give unto them, there are many mistakes, even amongst the saints themselves, in their apprehensions in and about the worship of God. They are many times careless in attending to his directions; negligent in praying for his assistance; slight and overly in the use of the means by him appointed for the discovery of truths; regardless of dispossessing their minds of prejudices and temptations, hindering them in the discovery of the mind of God. It is, therefore, no wonder they are left to be corrected under their own mistakes and miscarriages. But this hinders not but that the Spirit may be said to give the knowledge of the worship of God in the word unto believers; and that because it is not, nor can be, profitably and savingly attained any other way. As "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Spirit,"—so no man can know the way of God's house and worship but by the Spirit;—and we see by experience, that those that despise his assistance, rather trust to themselves and other men for the worship of God than to the word. This he does, ordinarily, in the use of means,—at least so far, that though in some particulars there may be amongst them mistakes, yet not usually such but that their performances are accepted of God in Christ. And in those things wherein they are at any the "otherwise minded"

than according to truth, if they continue waiting, that also shall be revealed unto them from the word by the Spirit. The worship of God is not of man's finding out, but of his designation who is "the wisdom of God." It is not taught by human wisdom, nor is it attainable by human industry; but by the wisdom and revelation of the Spirit of God. It is every way divine and heavenly in its rise, in its discovery; and so becoming the greatness and holiness of God. For what doth please God, God himself is the sole judge. If any thing else set up itself in competition with it, for beauty and glory, it will be found to be engaged in a very unequal contest at the last day.

2dly. Believers have this access by the Spirit, inasmuch as he enables them to approach unto God in a spiritual manner, *with grace in their hearts*, as he is the Spirit of grace and supplication. This is one special end for which the Spirit is promised unto believers,—namely, that he may be in them "a Spirit of grace and supplication," enabling them to draw nigh unto God in a gracious and acceptable manner, Zech. xii. 10, 11. And this is one part of the work that he doth perform, when he is bestowed on them according to the promise. Rom. viii. 26, 27: Let men do their best and utmost, they know not so much as what they ought to pray for; but the Spirit of Christ alone enables them to the whole work. If all the men in the world should lay their heads together to compose one prayer for the use of any one saint but for one day, they were not able to do it so as that it should answer his wants and conditions; nor can any man do it for himself, without the help and assistance of the Spirit, whose proper work this is.

It were a long work, to show what the Holy Ghost, as a Spirit of grace in the hearts of believers, doth to this end, that they may have, in their access unto God, a saving, spiritual communion with him in Christ; wherein, indeed, consists the chiefest head of all the glory and beauty that is in the worship of God. Should I handle it, I must insist upon all these particulars: —

(1st.) That the Holy Spirit discovers their wants unto them, their state and condition, with all the spiritual concernments of their souls; with which, without his effectual working, no man can come to a saving acquaintance spiritually. Men may think it an easy thing to know what they want; but he that knows the difficulty of obedience, the deceitfulness of the heart, the wiles of Satan, the crafts and sleights of indwelling sin, will not think so, but will grant that it is alone to be discovered by the Spirit of grace.

(*2dly.*) It is he alone which really affecteth the heart and soul with their wants, when they are discovered unto us. We are of ourselves dull and stupid in spiritual things; and when matters of the most inexpressible concernment are proposed, we can pass them by without being affected in any proportion to their weight and importance. The Holy Ghost deeply affects the heart with its spiritual concernments, works sorrow, fear, desire, answerable to the wants that are discerned, making "intercession with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered."

(*3dly.*) It is he alone that can reveal the saving relief and supplies that God hath provided in the promises of the gospel for all the wants of the saints; so enabling them to make

their supplications according to the mind of God. It is not the consideration of the letter of the promises that will discover savingly unto us the glorious relief that is provided in them for our wants; but it is revealed unto the saints effectually by the Spirit, as provided by the love of the Father, and purchased by the blood of the Son, and stored up for us in the covenant of grace, that we may make our requests for our portions according to the will of God.

(4thly.) It is the Holy Ghost that works in believers faith, love, delight, fervency, watchfulness, perseverance,—all those graces that give the soul communion with God in his worship,—and in Christ renders their prayers effectual. He doth this radically, by begetting, creating, ingenerating them in the hearts of believers, in the first infusion of the new, spiritual, vital principle with which they are endued when they are born of him; as also by acting, exciting, and stirring them up in every duty of the worship of God that they are called unto; so enabling them to act according to the mind of God.

By these hath the soul spiritual communion with God in the duties of his worship; and these, with sundry other things, should be handled, if we aimed to set out the work of the Spirit in the worship of the gospel as he is a Spirit of grace and supplication. But the mentioning of them in general is sufficient for the end proposed,—namely, to discover the beauty and the glory of the worship that is thus carried on. Herein lies that which all the beauty of the world fades before, and becomes as a thing of nought,—which brings all the outward pomp of ceremonious worship into contempt;—I mean the glory and excellency that lies in the spiritual communion of the soul with God, by the grace of the Holy Ghost, in that heavenly intercourse which is between God and his saints in their worship, by this means. The Holy Ghost is essentially God himself, blessed for ever in his own person. He comes upon the hearts of the elect, and communicates of his own grace unto them. These graces he enables them to act, exert, and put forth in their worship of God. These God delights in, as coming from himself, as of his own workmanship in us;—he seeth a return of himself to himself, of his grace to his glory: and by these do the saints approach into his presence, speak to him, treat with him, and hear from him. It is the language of faith and love alone, and the like graces of his Spirit, that God hears in his worship. Other voices, cries, and noises he regards not; yea, at least, if not some of them in themselves, yet all of them when these are wanting, are an abomination unto him. However, this is the beauty and the glory of the worship of the gospel,—the beauty and glory that God sees in it. Where this work of the Spirit of God is in his worship, there faith, love, delight, and fervency are in a saving and spiritual manner exercised. He is an atheist, who will deny that they are acceptable to God,—that this worship is glorious, beautiful, and comely: and he is no better, who thinks that any outward solemnity can render worship so, when these are wanting. So that they are the things on which the whole doth turn.

3dly. As always from the foundation of the world, so in the New Testament, the solemn worship of God is to be performed in the assemblies of his saints and people. Now, where the same worship is to be performed by many, the very law of nature and reason requireth that some one or more, according as there is necessity, should go before the rest of the assembly in the worship which they have to perform, and be as the hand, or mouth, or

eyes to the whole body or assembly. And so, also, hath our Lord ordained,—namely, that in all the public and solemn worship of gospel assemblies, there should be some appointed to go before them in the performance of the duties of the worship that he requireth of them, be they what they will. Now, as the things themselves, wherein these persons are to minister before the Lord in their assemblies, are all of them prescribed by God himself; so, as to the manner of their performance, there are these two marks or guides to direct the whole:—first, it must be so performed as to tend to the *glory* of God; and, secondly, to the *edification* of the assembly itself. It would be too long for me to show you what is required to this one thing, that the worship of God be carried on in the assembly to the edification of the saints; which is, that all the ordinances of God may have their proper work in them, and effects towards them, for the increase of their faith and graces, and carrying them on in their course of obedience and communion with God. The consideration of this work made the apostle say, *Pro;* " *tau'ta tiv" i jkanov*";;;;;; In a word, so far as possible it may be done, their state and condition is to be spread before the Lord in prayer, according as they experience it in their own souls,—their desires to be drawn forth and expressed,—their pleas for mercy and grace to be managed, with the like ends of prayer; their condition to be suited, in instruction, consolation, and exhortation, and the like, in preaching the word. So of all other ordinances; they are to be managed and administered so as may best tend to the edification of the assembly. Now, this is supposed by the third benefit that the saints receive by the Spirit, as to their approach unto God: he gives gifts and abilities, spiritual gifts unto them whom he calleth unto this work of going before the assemblies in the worship of God, that they may perform all things to the glory of God and the edification of the body. I shall not so much as once mention the supplies that are invented and found out by men for this end and purpose. There is not a soul that hath the least communion with God, but knows their emptiness and utter insufficiency for that which they pretend unto.

Now, that the Holy Ghost furnisheth men with gifts for this end and purpose, we have abundant testimonies in the Scripture; and, blessed be God, we have evidence of it abundantly in and from those who are endued with them, 1 Cor. xii. 4, 7, 8, 11. The design of the apostle in that chapter is to treat of the worship of God, as it is to be carried on and performed in the gospel assemblies of saints; of which he gives an instance in the Church of Corinth. For the right performance hereof he lays down, in the first verse, that spiritual gifts are bestowed. Being to treat of the public worship of God, he begins with spiritual gifts, whereby men are enabled thereunto. The author of all those gifts, he informs us in the fourth verse, is the Holy Ghost; he is sent by Christ to this very end and purpose, to bestow them on his churches. The end of the collation, he informs us, is the profit and edification of the whole body, verse 7. Every one that receives them, doth it to this purpose,—that he may use them to the good and benefit of the whole. To this end are they bestowed in great variety, as verse 8,—that by them the use of the body may be supplied, and church edification may be carried on. And having thus showed their nature, end, and distribution, he again asserts their author to be the Holy Ghost, verse 11. And we have direction, upon this foundation, given for the exercise and use of those gifts, in sundry places; as 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11.

This then, also, as to the more solemn and public worship of God, is performed by that

Spirit in whom we have an access unto the Father:—he gives spiritual gifts unto men, enabling them to perform it in a holy, evangelical manner, so as God may be glorified, and the assemblies of the saints edified, in the administration of all ordinances, according to what they are appointed unto. He enables men to pray, so as that the souls of the saints may be drawn forth thereby unto communion with God, according unto all their wants and desires; he enables them to preach or speak as the "oracles of God," so as that the saints may receive instruction suitable to their condition, as to all the ends of the good word of God, whose dispensation is committed unto them;—he enables men to administer the seals of the covenant so, that the faith of the saints may be excited and stirred up to act and exert itself in a way suitable to the nature of each ordinance. And all those gifts are bestowed on men on purpose for the good and edification of others; they are never exercised in a due manner, but they have a farther reach and efficacy in and upon the souls of the saints, than he that is intrusted with them was able to take a prospect of. He little knows how many of his words and expressions are, in the infinite wisdom of the Holy Ghost, suited in an unspeakable variety to the conditions of his saints;—here one, there another, is wrought upon, affected, humbled, melted, lifted up, rejoiced by them; the Holy Ghost making them effectual to the ends for which he hath given out the gifts from whence they do proceed. I might mention sundry other advantages which we have that belong to our access unto God by one Spirit; but because it were endless to enumerate all particulars, and they may be reduced to some one of these general heads, I shall mention no more of them. This, then, is the first evidence that we have in the words, given unto the glory, beauty, and excellency of gospel worship: In it we have an access unto the Father in the Spirit; which relates unto the things before mentioned, or rather touched on. Here is order: The Spirit reveals the mind of God as to the worship that is acceptable unto him;—he furnishes the souls of the saints with all those graces whereby and wherein they have communion with God in his worship;—he gives gifts unto some, enabling them to go before the assemblies in the worship of God, according to his mind, and unto their edification. Blessed order, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against! Order, proceeding from the God of order;—his own project and appointment! Here is beauty, decency, loveliness. It is all the work of the glorious and holy Spirit, which is like himself—holy, glorious, and beautiful; and to set up any thing of any man's finding out in competition with it, is that which the Lord's soul abhors.

(2.) As the saints in the gospel have access unto God *in the Spirit*, so they have all their access *in one Spirit*; and this is the spring of all the uniformity which God requires. So the apostle tells us, that, as to the gifts themselves, there are diversities of them, and difference in them, I Cor. xii. 4—6. But where, then, is uniformity? If one man have better and greater gifts than another;—one man be more eminent in one kind, another in another;—one excelling in prayer, another in prophesying and preaching,—what confusion must this needs breed! Where is, then, any uniformity in all this? The apostle answereth, verse 11. Here lies the uniformity of gospel worship,— that though the gifts bestowed on men for the public performance of it be various, and there is great diversity among them, yet it is *one Spirit* that bestows them all among them, and that in the order before mentioned. One and the same Spirit discovers the will and worship of God to them all;—one and the same Spirit works the same graces for their kind in the hearts of them all;—one and the same Spirit bestows the gifts that are necessary for the carrying on of

gospel worship in the public assemblies to them who are called to that work. And what if he be pleased to give out his gifts in some variously, as to particulars, "dividing to every one severally, as he will?" yet this hindereth not but that, as to the saints mentioned, they all approach unto God by one Spirit; and so have uniformity in their worship throughout the world. This is a *catholic uniformity*; when whatever is invented by men under that name reaches but to the next hedge, and, as might be easily proved and evinced, is the greatest principle of deformity and disorder in the world. This, then, is the uniformity of gospel worship:—all the saints, everywhere, have their access in it unto God in one Spirit, who worketh alike in the general in them all, though he gives out diversities of gifts, serving to the edification of the whole.

And these are the evidences that are directly and "in terminis" given to the proposition of the beauty, excellency, order, and uniformity, of gospel worship in the text, as we consider it absolutely in itself. Before I come to consider its glory comparatively, in reference to the outward solemn worship of the temple of old, I shall add but one consideration more, which is necessary for the preventing of some objections, as well as for the farther clearing of the truth insisted on; and that is taken from the place where spiritual worship is performed. Much of the beauty and glory of the old worship, according to carnal ordinances, consisted in the excellency of the place wherein it was performed;—first, the tabernacle of Moses; then the temple of Solomon, of whose glory and beauty we shall speak afterward. Answerable hereunto, do some imagine there must be a beauty in the place where men assemble for gospel worship; which they labour to paint and adorn accordingly. But they "err, not knowing the Scriptures." There is nothing spoken of the place and seat of gospel worship, but it is referred to one of these three heads,—all which render it glorious

1. It is performed in heaven. Though they who perform it are on earth, yet they do it, by faith, in heaven. The apostle saith that believers, in their worship, do "enter into the holiest;" which he exhorts them to draw nigh unto, Heb. x. 19, 22. What is the "holiest," whereinto they enter with their worship? It is that whereinto Jesus Christ is entered as their forerunner, Heb. vi. 20. It is into heaven itself chap. ix. 24. You will say, "How can these things be, that men should enter into heaven while they are here below?" I say, Are men "masters in Israel," and ask this question? They who have an access unto the immediate presence of God, and to the throne of grace, enter into heaven itself. And this adds to the glory we treat of. What poor low thoughts have men of God and his ways, who think there lies an acceptable glory and beauty in a little paint and varnish! Heaven itself, the place of God's glorious residence, where he is attended with all his holy angels, is the state [place?] of this worship. Hence is that glorious description given of it, Rev. iv. throughout; where it is expressly said to be "in heaven," though it is only the worship of the church that is described. It were easy from hence to manifest the glory we have spoken of, in the several parts of it. But I do but point out the heads of things.

2. The second thing mentioned, in reference to the place of this worship, is the persons of the saints; these are said to be the "temple of the Lord," 1 Cor. vi. 19, "Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God." Chap. iii. 16, "Know ye not" (verse 17) "the temple of God is holy?" God hath now no material temple; but he

hath chosen this spiritual one,—the hearts and souls of his saints: and beautiful temples they are, being washed with the blood of Christ, beautified with the graces of the Spirit, adorned for communion with him; hence "the King's daughter" is said to be "all glorious within," Ps. xlv. Whatever men may think, God, that knoweth his own graces in the hearts of his, and in whose eyes nothing is beautiful or of price but grace, knows and judges that this place of his worship, this temple that he hath chosen, is full of beauty and glory. Let who will be judge, that pretends to be a Christian, whether is more beautiful in the sight of God,— "a living stone," adorned with all the graces of the Spirit, a heart full of the grace of Christ,—or a dead stone cut out of the quarries, though graven into the similitude of a man?

3. The assemblies of the saints are spoken of as God's temple, and the seat and place of public, solemn, gospel worship, Eph. ii. 21, 22. Here are many living stones framed into an holy house in the Lord, an habitation for God by his Spirit. God dwells here. As he dwelt in the temple of old, by some outward, carnal pledges of his presence; so, in the assemblies of his saints, which are his habitation, he dwells unspeakably in a more glorious manner by his Spirit. Here, according to his promise, is his habitation. Now, the saints' assemblies, according to the order of the gospel, are "a building fitly framed together:" as the tabernacle and temple were of old in their outward structure, whereby they were raised; so they in their spiritual union in and under Christ their head. And they are a temple, a holy temple,—holy with the "holiness of truth," as the apostle speaks, chap. iv. 24;—not a typical, relative, but a real holiness, and such as the Lord's soul delighteth in. I know some can see no beauty in the assemblies of the saints, unless there be an outward beauty and splendour in the fabric and building wherein they convene. But that is not at all the thing in question, what some men can see, or cannot see. Christ himself had unto some "no form nor comeliness that he should be desired"—no more have his saints, his ways, his worship. That is not it which we inquire after; but what is beautiful, comely, and of price in the eyes and judgment of God. Neither is that the matter in question, whether these or those are saints of God, or no? But only, whether an assembly of saints, as such, which are the temple of God, and being called together according to the order of the gospel, be not a glorious seat of worship? God saith it is so; and if men say otherwise, those that are not enchanted with what I shall not name, will easily know what to give credit to.

SECONDLY. Proceed we now, in the next place, to set forth the glory and beauty of this worship of the gospel *comparatively*, with reference to the solemn outward worship which, by God's own appointment, was used under the Old Testament; which, as we shall show, was far more excellent on many accounts than any thing of the like kind,—that is, as to outward splendour and beauty,—that was ever found out by men. And I shall do this the more willingly, because the Holy Ghost doth so much and so frequently—and that not without many great and weighty causes—insist upon it in the New Testament, having intimated it beforehand in many places of the Old. To the right understanding of what is gospel, and delivered in Scripture on this account, some things are previously to be considered:—

I. As the whole worship of the old church, so the whole manner of it, with all its rites,

ceremonies, and ornaments, both in the tabernacle and temple, were of God's own appointment. There was not the least part of the fabric wherein his worship was celebrated, nor any ornament of it,—not one rite or ceremony that did attend it,—but it was all of it wholly of God's own designation and command. This is known and confessed. Moses made all things "according to the pattern showed him in the mount;" and at the finishing of the whole work, it is in one chapter ten [eight?] this repeated, that he did as the Lord commanded him, Exod. xl. Now, surely this gave it a beauty, order, and glory incomparably above whatever the wisest of the sons of men are able to invent. "Let the potsherd contend with the potsherds of the earth; but woe unto him that contends with his Maker!" The worship of the pope and his invention may possibly outdo the beauty and order of the worship of the Turk and his invention; but I hope they will not compare with God, nor make themselves equal with him. But why should I say I hope it, when the contrary is evident? For doth he not undertake to assign new rules of his own in the worship of God? and doth he not therein make himself equal with God, whose prerogative it is to be the only lawgiver to his people's consciences, and the only prescriber of his own worship? But this I may yet hope, that men will not nakedly aver, that what is of their appointment is equal unto, and comparable with, what God appoints. Take their institutions and God's together, and the former, surely, will have great disadvantage in respect of the authors. This, in general, I suppose, will be granted, though men be very apt practically to make void the commands of God by their traditions and institutions, laying more weight upon some one of them than on all the commands of Jesus Christ.

"But, it may be, though God appointed that worship of old, and all the concernments of it, he intended not to make that beautiful and glorious, but plain and homely; so that it doth not follow that it is beautiful and excellent because it was by him appointed." Answer, Though we may well and safely abide by this general proposition, that what God hath appointed in his own worship is therefore beautiful and glorious, excellent, orderly, and comely, because he hath appointed it; yet I add,—

2. That it was God's intendment to make, appoint, and dispose of all things so, that the solemnity of his worship might be very beautiful and glorious. He appoints the high priest's garments to be made expressly "for glory and for beauty," Exod. xxviii. 2,—such as might be specious and goodly to look upon; and speaking of the church—state, when he had formed and fashioned it by his institution, he saith, her renown went forth among the heathen for beauty, for it was perfect through the comeliness he had put upon her, Ezek. xvi. 14. There was in her ways of worship a renowned beauty, a perfect comeliness; whence, saith the prophet, "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary," Jer. xvii. 12. But I shall not need to multiply testimonies to this purpose. Who knows not what things are spoken of the tabernacle, the temple, and all the worship belonging to them, everywhere in the Scripture? As God appointed, so it came to pass;—it was the most beautiful solemnity that ever the sun shone upon. Mosaical worship, I say, as celebrated in Solomon's temple, outdid all the glory and splendour that ever the world, in any place, in any age from the foundation of it, ever enjoyed. Should all the princes of Europe lay their treasures together, they were not able to build a fabric of that charge, magnificence, and glory, as was Solomon's temple. It were endless to go

over particulars. The garments of the high priest were such as rendered him so awful and glorious, that Alexander the Great, that famous conqueror of the east, fell down before him with a prostrate reverence; The order of the house, and all the worship in it,—who can fix his mind upon it without admiration! How glorious was it when the house of Solomon stood in its greatest order and beauty, all overlaid with gold,—thousands of priests and Levites ministering in their orders, with all the most solemn musical instruments that David found out, and the great congregation assembled of hundreds of thousands, all singing praises to God! Let any man in his thoughts a little compare the greatest, most solemn, pompous, and costly worship that any of the sons of men have in these latter days invented and brought into the Christian Church, with this of the Judaical, and he shall quickly find that it holds no proportion with it,—that it is all a toy, a thing of nought in comparison of it. Take the Cathedral of Peter in Rome: bring in the pope and all his cardinals in all their vestments, habiliments, and ornaments; fill their choir with the best singers they can get; set out and adorn their images and pictures to the utmost that their treasures and superstition will reach to;—then compare it to Solomon's Temple and the worship thereof; and,—without the help of the consideration that the one was from heaven, the other is of men,—the very nature of the things themselves will manifest how vain the present pretences are to glory and beauty. How much more may this be spoken of such underling pretenders as some are!

These things being premised, we say now, that, notwithstanding this whole worship, and all the concernments of it, was appointed by God himself; notwithstanding it was designed by him to be beautiful and glorious, and that indeed it was the very top of what external beauty and splendour could reach unto;—yet that it was no way comparable to the beauty and glory of this spiritual worship of the New Testament; yea, had no glory in comparison of it. This, then, I shall briefly demonstrate:—(1.) In general; and then, (2.) By an induction of some particular instances.

For the former, I need go no farther than that place where the apostle doth expressly handle this comparison, viz., 2 Cor. iii. 7—10. He doth here on set purpose compare the ministration of the law in the letter, with all its outward legal worship, rites, and ceremonies, with the administration of the gospel in the Spirit, and the worship of God attending thereon. And first, he acknowledgeth that the old ministration was very glorious; which he either gives an instance of, or proves it by that of Moses' face shining when he came down from the mount, when he had received the law, and the pattern of all that worship which he was to appoint unto that church. It seems that God left that shining on the face of Moses—which was such that the people could not bear the brightness of it—to testify how glorious that was about which he had received revelation; so that, indeed, saith the apostle, "That ministration was glorious, very glorious,—yea, glory in the abstract," verse 9. Nothing was there ever in the world to be compared with it. We will, then, compare it now with the ministration of the Spirit, and the worship of God under the gospel. It may be he will say, "It is not all out so glorious, indeed." Nay, but he goes farther, and tells us that this doth so excel in glory, comeliness, and excellency, that, in respect unto it, the other had *no glory* at all. What, then, may be said of any thing invented by men in the worship of God for glory and beauty? I dare not say what the apostle saith of that which God himself appointed,—that it hath any glory and beauty in

itself. But yet, suppose it hath so; let men esteem it as glorious and beautiful as they can possibly fancy it to be,—yet, unless the same vail be on their minds in reading the Gospel which is on the Jews' in reading Moses, they cannot but see and acknowledge that it hath no glory in comparison of that spiritual worship which we have described.

Some particular instances will make the general comparison more evident. I shall only name these three, which—being the principal spring of all the beauty, glory, and order of the worship of old—are peculiarly considered by the apostle to this very purpose, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where he sets out the excellency of the evangelical administrations of the covenant and worship of God above and beyond the legal:—

1. The first of these was the temple, the seat of all the solemn outward worship of the old church. The beauty and glory of it were in part spoken to before; nor shall I insist on any particular description of it. It may suffice, that it was the principal state [place] of the beauty and order of the Judaical worship, and which rendered all exceeding glorious;—so far, that the people idolized it, and put their trust in it;—that upon the account of it they should be assuredly preserved, notwithstanding their presumptuous sins: and, indeed, it had such blessings and promises annexed unto it, that if there were at this day any place or house in the world that had the like, I should desire to be among the first that should enter into a pilgrimage of going to it, though it were as far beyond Jerusalem as it is thither. But yet, notwithstanding all this, Solomon himself, in his prayer at the dedication of that house, 1 Kings viii. 27, seems to intimate that there was some check upon his spirit, considering the unanswerableness of the house to the great majesty of God. It was a house on the earth,— a house that he did build with his hands; intimating that he looked farther to a more glorious house than that. And what is it, if it be compared with the temple of gospel worship? Whatever is called the temple now of the people of God, is as much beyond that of old as spiritual things are beyond carnal, as heavenly beyond earthly, as eternal beyond temporal. First, In some sense the body of Christ is our temple, as himself called it, speaking of the temple of his body as being prefigured by it,—as having the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him, typified by the presence of God in the old temple, and being the centre wherein all his people meet with their worship of God, as those of old did in the temple. And surely there is no comparison, for beauty and excellency, between the house that Solomon built and the Son of God, "who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." Again, The persons and the assemblies of the saints, as I showed before, are a temple to God under the gospel. They are his body, Eph. i. 23; and his house, Heb. iii. 6. Nor is the old temple, made of wood and stones, gold and silver, to be compared with this living house, washed with the blood of Christ, adorned with the real graces of the Spirit, and garnished with all the choice jewels of God's eternal love. They are God's delight, "the first—fruits of the creature" to him, the spouse of Christ,—through his graces altogether lovely. The Lord Jesus sees more beauty and glory in the weakest assemblies of his saints, coming together in his name, and acted and guided in his worship and ways by his Spirit, than ever was in all the worship of Solomon's temple when it was in its glory. Thirdly, Heaven itself, the holy place not made with hands, is also the saints' temple under the gospel. Believers have in their worship an open way into the holiest made for them by Christ, who entered into it as the forerunner, Heb. vi. 20; opening it to them, also giving admission into it, chap. x.

19—21. And how exceedingly doth this exalt the excellency of the spiritual worship of the gospel! What was the glory of Solomon's temple to the glory of the meanest star in heaven! How much less was it, then, in comparison of the glorious presence of God in the highest heavens, whither believers enter with all their worship, even where Christ sits at the right hand of God!

2. The second spring of the beauty of the old worship—which was, indeed, the hinge upon which the whole turned—was the priesthood of Aaron, with all the administrations committed to his charge. The pomp, state, and ceremonies, that the Papists have invented in their outward worship, or that heap which they have, in several parcels, borrowed of the Heathen and Jews, is a toy in comparison of the magnificence of the Aaronical administrations. The high priest under the gospel is Christ alone. Now, I shall spare the pains of comparing these together;—partly, because it will be by all confessed that Christ is incomparably more excellent and glorious; and partly, because the apostle, on set purpose, handles this comparison in sundry instances in the Epistle to the Hebrews; where any one may run and read it, it being the main subject—matter of that most excellent epistle.

3. The order, glory, number, significancy, of their sacrifices, was another part of their glory. And, indeed, he that shall seriously consider that one solemn anniversary sacrifice of expiation and atonement, which is instituted, Lev. xvi., will quickly see that there was very much glory and solemnity in the outward ceremony of it. "But now," saith the apostle, "*we have a better sacrifice*," Heb. ix. 23. We have him who is the high priest, and altar, and sacrifice,—all himself; of worth, value, glory, beauty,—upon the account of his own person, the efficacy of his oblation, the real effect of it,—more than a whole creation, if it might have been all offered up at one sacrifice. This is the standing sacrifice of the saints, offered "once for all ;"—as effectual now any day as if offered every day: and other sacrifices, properly so called, they have none. I might mention other particulars; but I suppose, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have in some measure manifested the excellency, beauty, order, and uniformity, of the spiritual worship of the gospel; and that both absolutely in itself, and in comparison with any other way of worship whatever. From all which it will be easily made to appear, that this may well be reckoned among the unspeakable privileges that are purchased for us by the death of Christ;—which was the thing first proposed to consideration.

ⁱ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 9 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 53-83.