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“Godliness and Faithfulness”

Help Lord, for the Godly man ceaseth;  
for the faithful fail from among the children of men.

Psalm 12:1

This psalm, as the title informs us, was composed by David, the sweet singer of Israel, and (though referring principally to the prevailing corruption and degeneracy of that day) he probably penned it, when deeply affected with the surprising news of the death of some eminently pious and useful person: For the psalm begins very abruptly; which is natural to grief. Help Lord... But why does this great and pious prince so suddenly, so earnestly and passionately cry out for divine help? The reason follows; and it is a weighty one too---bitter experience hath lately taught me to feel its force; ---The Godly man ceaseth, the faithful fail from among the children of men. The text does not say godly men cease, but the godly man ceaseth, probably pointing at some particular pious person, over whom cruel death had then lately made a conquest.

Perhaps it was David's familiar friend---a guide as well as acquaintance--one with whom he frequently took sweet counsel, and walked in company with him to the house of God. How affecting was this stroke! How great the loss, how keen the smart! Behold king David bleeding under the divine hand, and mourning the final departure of a worthy friend! His pleasant harp unstrung and hanging upon the willows! His bosom swelling with tender passions; but still not opening his mouth in way of complaint, because God had done it. At length words give vent to the swelling tide of grief, and in seemingly broken accents, he utters the text---Help Lord for the Godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.

*Let us consider the amiable character of the man pointed at in the text, consisting of godliness and faithfulness. First, godliness (text paraphrased). Man being laced in the creation under certain circumstances and relations,*

is, in consequence thereof, obliged to the exercise and discharge of various affections and duties. As he stands related to the transcendently glorious, most perfect and infinitely blessed God, deriving from him life and breath, and all things, he is under indispensable obligations to exercise toward him certain holy affections and duties which are known by the name of godliness and are summarily comprehended in that first and great command in the law, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. And besides these, there is another set of duties to which he is obligated, arising from his relation to his fellow creatures. As the same God “hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth;” as we all originally sprang from the same earthly parents, and are therefore connected together by the endearing ties of nature, it is command founded upon the most perfect equity “that we love our neighbour as ourselves,” or perform those various branches of duty prescribed in the second table of the Moral Law;---in order to which, the virtue or moral excellence called faithfulness is pre-requisite. Godliness and faithfulness may be distinguished, but not separated. For the godly and faithful are, in the sense of the scriptures in general and of our text in particular, the very same sort of persons; and by these different terms is only intended to exhibit to view different parts of their lovely and united character. And to follow the method, that is here presented me, in considering the same person in different points of light, I may proceed to say, that the godly man is one, who loves God supremely; entertains the highest veneration of his names, titles, and attributes; fears and hates to offend him and heartily delights to please him. Hence, it appears already, that “godliness is a flower, which never grows in nature's garden;” For we are, by nature, enemies to God and entirely indisposed to submit to his laws and government. Wherefore the godly man must have had this native enmity slain---his affections sanctified---his will bowed ---his conscience purged, and his whole soul “created anew in Christ Jesus.” Entirely sensible of the depravity of his heart, he has been brought to lie, as a poor lost, helpless creature, at the feet of Jesus and been enabled by a lively faith of the operation of the Holy Spirit, to receive and embrace him as the alpha and omega of his salvation; while from sweet experience, he could say, “how great is his goodness! And how great is his beauty.” The godly man hath “submitted himself to the righteousness of God,” and

therefore is not "going about to establish a righteousness of his own." Fully sensible that his own works cannot justify him, either in whole or in part, he lays hold upon Christ "the hope set before him in the gospel;" which hope he retains "as an anchor of his soul both sure and steadfast and which entereth into that within the veil." Fully sensible also, that such a faith as does not produce good works is no better than a "gilded vanity, a painted bubble, or a dead carafe;" he is anxious to bear much fruit, not principally for his own sake, but rather that his heavenly father may be thereby glorified. Perfection is his aim, striving to be holy as God is holy. Not priding or content himself with "a form of godliness," while destitute of the power; he turns his eyes inward and is concerned to see the living graces of the spirit within him, as a "well of living water," actively "springing up into eternal life." The holy Ghost dwells in him, and, by almighty efficacy, enlightens, quickens and animates his soul, enabling him to conquer sin, satan, and all their accomplices, and to rise superior to every opposition; running the Christian race with alacrity, and delight, "and pressing forward toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

*Let us now consider the amiable character of faithfulness.* Now, faithfulness intends integrity and uprightness in the discharge of duties, or honestly in all our various dealings with mankind. The really faithful man is not only true to his God, and steadfast to his covenant; but is also honest and upright in dealing with his fellow-creatures. For "he walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness and speaketh the truth in his heart; backbiting not with his tongue, nor doing evil to his neighbour, nor unwarrantably taking up a reproach against him." Abhorring a lie, he is careful that his words be the index, or genuine copy of his real sentiments. Detesting likewise all insidious disguise, craft and deceit, he so far as is consistent with true prudence and discretion, is, in the main, open in his conversation and deportment. The faithful man is not used to projecting schemes in order to raise himself upon the ruins of others. It is not his employ to darken those about him, that he may shine in their eclipse. His soul disdains the thing. Nor will he give you fair and soft words while present, and then, in your absence, make free with your character, by industriously exposing every spot and blemish therein, but acts one consistent part;

paying a steadfast adherence to all the laws of humanity and friendship---rejoicing at the prosperity or good name of others, and heartily feeling for them in adversity; or when, by any misdemeanor, they have brought a blot upon their reputation. If he tells you that he is your friend, you may justly rely upon it, and embrace him as such, without fearing a snake in the grass--a fly deceiver; "for though he swear to his own hurt, he changeth not." The faithful man considers himself as a citizen of the world, and is therefore filled with benevolent regards to mankind in general. . . He is also conscientious and exact in the discharge of relative duties. If he has parents he "obeys them in the Lord;" from a conviction that "it is right." Or if a parent himself, it is his great care to "train up his children in the way they should go," warning them of the paths of the destroyer, urging them to "remember their creator, urging them to "remember their creator in the days of their youth," and solicitously endeavoring that the example which he exhibits to them, should repeat the precepts of his lips. As a husband, he is king and tender, as well as faithful. To his neighbours he is benevolent and obliging; in dealing with whom or with others, this is his favorite maxim, "whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye also the same unto them." And whatsoever office he may sustain in church or state, it is his great concern to discharge it with fidelity. . . Happy indeed are "the excellent ones of the earth," to whom this character may be justly applied! For "as the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so are they among the sons of men."

In our meeting this day we pray that our observance of Christian baptism pleaseth the Lord. That the Holy Spirit sanctify the child's soul and make him an apple-tree among the trees of the wood. That Christ Jesus keep him from sin and from doing evil. That God, our Creator and Helper, pour the oil of the Divine graces of godliness and faithfulness upon him all the days of his life. And lastly, that this assembly be faithful in our duty of praying, Help Lorde. Amen.

(Except for the last paragraph, this message is quoted from Mr. Ezra Samson's sermon preached on the Lord's Day after the death of Mr. Jonathan Parker on April 24, 1776. The sermon was published upon request of the surviving relatives of the deceased and a number of others, in Boston by J. Gill, in Queen Street, 1776.)