

ceremonial. * * * A private fast is when, upon the view either of public causes not considered of by such as are in authority, or of the like but more private occasion, as domestic or personal, a Christian is moved, either with his family or special friends, or by himself solitarily, to humble himself before the Lord." In the *Life of Brainerd*, *President Edwards* writes thus: "But particularly his example and success with regard to one duty, in an especial manner, may be of great use to both ministers and private Christians; I mean the duty of *secret fasting*. The reader has seen how much Mr. Brainerd recommends this duty, and how frequently he exercised himself in it; nor can it well have escaped observation, how much he was owned and blessed in it, and of what great benefit it evidently was to his soul. Among all the many days he spent in secret fasting and prayer, that he gives an account of in his diary, there is scarce an instance of one but what was either attended or soon followed in the apparent success, and a remarkable blessing in special increase and consolations of God's Spirit—and very often before the day was ended. But it must be observed, that when he set about this duty, he did it in good earnest, 'stirring himself up to take hold of God,' and 'continuing instant in prayer,' with much of the spirit of Jacob, who said to the angel, 'I will not let thee go except thou bless me.'" To this it may suffice to add the following extract from the *Memoirs of Payson*: "It is moreover true, that the most eminent saints of ancient and later times have devoted frequent seasons to private fasting and prayer; and the practice may therefore be ranked among the essential means of rapid and extensive growth in grace. It were well for individuals, it were well for the Church, if the practice should revive and become common. There are some distinguished labourers in the vineyard of the Lord, who practise the essential duty here recommended, not so much by totally abstaining from food beyond the accustomed intervals, as by 'denying themselves' at every meal, and using a spare and simple diet at all times; a course well adapted to preserve both mind and body in the best condition for biblical research and devotional exercises. This modification of the duty was much practised by Mr. Payson, and strongly recommended by him to the members of his church. He would have them, when fasting on their own private account, not 'appear unto men to fast,' but come to the table, which was spread for their families, with a cheerful countenance, and partake sparingly of its provisions.'"

Thus far have we written in illustration of a means of grace which we fear is not in much repute; nor can we leave off before pointing out the substantial and essential part of it as consisting in deep humiliation before God. By sin we are shorn of the locks of our strength. Its degradation is realized, and we say, against Thee, Thee only have we sinned. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. When sin sits lightly on the conscience, when excuses are formed to conceal its hideousness, surely there is no contrition. A broken and a contrite spirit, God will not despise. Sin is bitter to the enlightened soul. Seen in its true colours, it is black as hell; loathsome and malignant, it is felt as a burning coal in the bosom, to be cast away; or as defiling pitch on the garments, to be removed. Mourning on account of sin, the cry is, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" That with which we are vexed may come forth only by prayer and fasting. Lowliness of soul is deepened by a review