

The fear of falling under the displeasure of God, to which good men are often liable, is experienced only in this world, and not in the next. That seeming displeasure which God sometimes exercises towards His own, is not the same with that which comes upon the children of disobedience. We must not confound the temporal hidings of God's countenance, with everlasting destruction from His presence. Now when the soul is kept under this fear of the Divine displeasure, it is a powerful means of obedience; and when the loving kindness of God is clearly perceived by the soul, this fear will certainly prevail, and will produce a sincere respect to every one of God's commandments. They who have felt the effects of God's displeasure, and are made sensible of His love, will be careful to avoid the one, and to preserve the other. Who are so likely to be afraid of receiving a spirit of bondage again, as they who have already felt it? and who are so careful of interrupting their communion and fellowship with God, as they who have tasted the sweet enjoyment of this invaluable blessing? And, therefore, who are so anxious and solicitous to preserve the possession of so precious a privilege, by walking circumspectly in the way of truth, which affords so much pleasure and delight? He therefore that hath the loving kindness of God always before his eyes, will be rendered most capable of resisting the temptations and allurements of the world, which he knows are but too apt to seduce him from the path of duty. An abiding sense of the love of God upon the heart, will arm him against the seductive power of every false and delusive pleasure; and will enable him to walk closely with God, so as neither to forfeit His favor, nor provoke His displeasure. The frowns of the world indeed too often affect the human mind, and turn men aside from their obedience; but a due apprehension of the love of God is a good security against this temptation also. The belief of God's being reconciled to us, and a conviction that His loving countenance is reconciled to us, is quite sufficient to enable us to overcome every trial which may fall to our lot. It matters not who they are, that are against us; nor what they can do against us, so long as we know that God is on our side. This pleasing consideration gives a relish to life, and sweetens all its enjoyments. Life is indeed the greatest, and the most desirable of all temporal blessings; and nothing can exceed it but the favor of God, our life: for the Psalmist affirms that "His favor is better than life." Who would not then prefer this loving kindness of God to his own life, which hangs continually in doubt before him, and of which he can have no assurance; when he knows that the living God is his certain portion, and his eternal reward? Who would not freely yield up and part with

his life, rather than forfeit the loving kindness of God, and incur the everlasting effects of His wrath and displeasure?

The last argument I shall offer to prove the argument in the text is this: That the fear of death is often a very dangerous and hurtful snare, which can scarcely be overcome without a lively sense of the favour and loving kindness of God impressed upon the mind, and prevailing in the heart. Death, which will separate the soul from the body, is the lion in the way, which discourages and frightens many from the discharge of difficult and hazardous duties. Thousands, through a simple cowardice, have rather chosen to shipwreck their faith, and prostitute their conscience, than mingle their blood with their sacrifices. But they who have the comforts of God to delight their souls, are more willingly brought to meet the King of Terrors. If God cause His face to shine, what should hinder our cheerful descent into the valley of the shadow of death? It matters not when, or in what manner we go down to the grave, if the presence of God go along with us, and if He enlightens our darkness with the light of His countenance. Some persons are happy at the hour of death in the friendship of those who have been dear to them in life; but what is this compared with the loving kindness of God, which smiles upon us with complacency, and inspires us in our last moments with ineffable joy and delight? Who would not then earnestly wish for and desire to enjoy so invaluable a blessing and privilege in his last extremity—in his awful conflict with the power of death, and the terrors of the grave? Now is the time to prepare for this unavoidable event, and to lay up provision for our comfortable support, when we are about to enter upon this dreary journey. Let us ever remember, the most effectual method and way to secure the attainment of this happy enjoyment is to cultivate an interest in the favor and loving kindness of God, by a sincere and impartial obedience to all His holy and righteous commandments, and by a strong and saving faith in Jesus Christ. This, and this alone will fortify our minds with consolation and hope in the most trying moments of life, and will enable us to pass thro' that dark and formidable valley of death without fear or dismay, in the comfortable assurance of the divine presence, and the joyful hope of the Holy Spirit to strengthen and establish our faith, and to conduct us in peace and safety to the everlasting regions of happiness and glory. I now proceed to make some application and improvement on what has been already said on this subject. And, in the first place, if our obedience to the commands of God be excited by a sense of His loving kindness towards us—then *this* should certainly induce us to study, by every means in our power, to strengthen our interest in His favor,—and to labor after larger measures and degrees of it. At the same time we