

"I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly."

Psalm 119:8

The resolution to "*keep the Lord's statutes*" is the natural result of having "*learned his righteous judgments.*" But how happily does David combine "*simplicity*" of dependence with "*godly sincerity*" of obedience! Firm in his purpose, but distrustful of his strength, instantly upon forming his resolution, he recollects that the performance is beyond his power; and therefore the next moment, and almost the same moment, he follows it up with prayer, "*I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.*" Oh! beware of self-confidence in the Christian course. We stumble or advance, as we lean upon an arm of flesh, or upon an Almighty Saviour. Temporary desertion may be the seasonable chastisement of spiritual wantonness. When grace has been given in answer to prayer, it was not duly prized, or diligently improved. The "*Beloved*"--in answer to solicitation--"*is come into his garden:*" he knocks at the door, but the spouse is "*asleep.*" The answer to prayer was not expected, not waited for, and therefore not enjoyed; and the sleeper awakes too late, and finds herself forsaken by the object of her desire. (Cant. iv. 16, with v. 1-6.) Again--when we have given place to temptation (2 Chron. xxxii. 31); when "*our mountain stands strong*" (Ps. xxx. 6, 7); when love for our Savior "*waxes cold,*" and our earnestness in seeking him is fainting (Cant. iii. 1-4); we must not be surprised, if we are left for a time to the trial of a deserted state.

Yet we sometimes speak of the hidings of God's countenance, as if it were a sovereign act, calling for implicit submission; when the cause should at least be sought for, and will generally be found, in some "*secret thing*" of indulgence, unwatchfulness, or self-dependence. (Job, xv. 11.) It was while David "*kept silence*" from the language of contrition, that he felt the pressure of the heavy hand of his frowning God (Ps. xxxii. 3, 4); and may not the darkness, which has sometimes clouded our path, be the voice of our God--"*Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God.*" (Jer. ii. 19.)

But in the engagement of the Lord's everlasting covenant, how clear is the warrant of faith!--how ample the encouragement for prayer--"*Forsake me not utterly!*" David knew and wrote of the Lord's unchangeable faithfulness to his people; and while he dreaded even a temporary separation from his God more than any worldly affliction, he could plead that gracious declaration--"*Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.*" (Ps. lxxxix. 33). We would not indeed make the promises of grace an encouragement to carelessness: yet it is indispensable to our spiritual establishment that we receive them in their full, free, and sovereign declaration. How many fainting souls have been refreshed by the assurances--"*For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee: with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer!*" "*My sheep shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.*" (Isa. liv. 7, 8. John, x. 28.) In a lowly, self-abased, and dependent spirit, we shall best, however, learn to "*make our boast in the Lord;*" "*confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in us, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*" (Ps. xxxiv. 2. Philip. i. 6.) And even if awhile destitute of

sensible consolation, still our language will be, "I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob; and I will look for him." (Isa. viii. 17.)

Great, indeed, is the danger and evil to the soul, if we apprehend the Lord to have *forsaken* us, because we are in darkness; or that we are out of the way, because we are in perplexity. These are the very hand-posts, that show us that we are in the way of his own promised leading--painful exercise--faithful keeping--eternal salvation: "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, *and not forsake them.*" (Isa. xlii. 16.) Oh! the rest--the satisfaction of placing an implicit confidence in a covenant-keeping God!

Forsaken we may be--but not *utterly*. David was *forsaken*, not like Saul. (Ps. xxx. 7; with 1 Sam. xxviii. 6, 16.) Peter was *forsaken*, not like Judas (Matt. xxvi. 75; with xxvii. 3-6), *utterly* and for ever. What foreboding have you of such desertion? Is your heart willing to forsake him? Have you no mournings and thirstings for his return? "If, indeed, you forsake him, he will *forsake* you." (2 Chron. xv. 2. Comp. 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.) But can you forsake him? 'Let him do as seemeth him good (is the language of your heart); I will wait for him, follow after him, cleave to his word, cling to his cross.' Mark his dealings with you. Inquire into their reason. Submit to his dispensation. If he *forsakes*, beg his return: but trust your *forsaking* God. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." (Job, xiii. 15. Isa. l. 10. Hab. iii. 17, 18.) Though my comfort is clouded, my hope remains unchanging, unchangeable--such as I would not resign for the glory of an earthly crown. What are these earnest breathings--this abiding confidence, but his own work in us? And can the Lord "forsake the work of his own hands?" (Ps. cxxxviii. 8.) Sooner should heaven and earth pass, than the faithful engagements of the gospel be thus broken.¹

¹ Augustine's paraphrase of this verse is beautifully illustrative of the believer's conflict in a state of temporary desertion. "O Lord, if--lest I should be proud, and should 'say in my prosperity, I shall never be removed'--it pleaseth thee to tempt me, yet forsake me not over-long;" that is, if thou hast thus forsaken me, that I may know how weak I am without thy help, yet "*forsake me not utterly,*" lest I perish. I know that of thy good-will thou hast given me strength; and if thou turnest away thy face from me, I shall forthwith be troubled. "O forsake me not, that I perish not."